

The Omen

Issue 59.1

H.Score 0985797120

Score 0050752860

Player ★★★★★★★★

Spell ★★★★★★

Power **MAX**

Graze 690

Point 161/250

Time 6579/8500

Normal

東方永夜

9/25/2023



Love Sign "Penis Blast"



The Omen • Volume 59, Issue 1 IN THIS ISSUE...

Speak:

Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Outsourcing IT to Ellucian...

[p.4](#)

Turnip with Rachel... [p.8](#)

:(... [p.9](#)

Calllous... [p.10](#)

initial thoughts on medium... [p.10](#)

A Smorgasbord of Spicy Strats to Support You in Smashing
Your Starting Semester to Smithereens... [p.11](#)

Every Song in Glee and Whether or not it's better than the
Original: Season 1A... [p.17](#)

Lies:

How could you peachtray me... [p.25](#)

Write your own poem!... [p.26](#)

The intergalactic adventures of a youth choir through time and
space... [p.27](#)

grout stains glass, elaborated... [p.38](#)

"I'm Died"... [p.42](#)

I saw Sally... [p.43](#)

Us When the Omen Asks Where the Dehumidier Went... [p.48](#)

Oops! All Nic!:

Learning how to make a roux is not as hard as it sounds...

[p.49](#)

Project Starship X review... [p.51](#)

The Price of Definition... [p.54](#)

Staff Box: (In order of
appearance)

Mia: Ed absorbed it into his
being

Nic: I don't believe in
dehumidifiers

Max: I shitted & farted it
willow: it was overtaken by
mold

Michael: I ate it

Jay: monkey >:)

Cyan: I eated it

Jack: it was never real

Violet: Dimensional Transfer

Justice: Yoshi!

Charlie: I think Giuliani took it
to stop his hair from melting

Finch: Someone got trapped
in this room and ate it for
sustenance

Adonis: Somebody stole it

Leo: I took it with me to Japan

Lucas: hah. nothin' happened
to it, just on vacation. Hey,
Paulie, get the shovel.

Chris: []

Jude: It got raptured

María: I walk away and
my ass is suspiciously
dehumidifier-shaped

Seoyoung: []

Cate: I ate her.

Sam: Up your butt

Lin: Goop man

Front Cover: Nicolas Utakis-Smith

Back Cover: Maxwell Amador-Ann Gamboa

Submissions are due always, constantly, so submit forever. You can submit in any format (no PDFs please) by CD, Flash Drive, singing telegram, carrier pigeon, paper airplane, Fed-Ex, Pony Express, or email. Get your submissions to omen@hampshire.edu, the Omen Office, Mia's mailbox (1084), Willow's mailbox (1265), or Max's mailbox (0509).

Policy

The Omen is an every-other-week-ly publication that is the world's only example of the consistent application of a straightforward policy: we publish all signed submissions from members of the Hampshire community that break neither the law nor the Hampshire College Student Handbook. Send your impassioned yet poorly-thought-out rants, self-insertion fanfiction, MS Paint comics, and whiny emo poetry to omen@hampshire.edu; we'll publish it all, and we're happy to do it. The Omen is about giving you a voice, no matter how little you deserve it. Since its founding in December of 1992 by Stephanie Cole, the Omen has hardly ever missed an issue, making it Hampshire's longest-running publication.

Your Omen submission (you're submitting right now, right?) might not be edited, and we can't promise any spellchecking either, so any horrendous mistakes are your fault, not ours. We do promise not to insert comical spelling mistakes in submissions to make you look foolish.

Your submission must include the name you use around campus: an open forum comes with a responsibility to take ownership of your views. Views expressed in the Omen do not necessarily reflect the views of the Omen editor, the Omen staff, or anyone, anywhere, living or dead.

The Omen staff consists of whoever shows up for Omen layout, which take place every other Friday at 7:00 p.m. in the basement of Merrill A. You should come and answer the staff box question. We don't bite. You can find the Omen every other Monday in Saga, the post office, online at expelallo.men, and just about any other place we can find to put it.

Find all issues here!



Views in the Omen (5)

Do not necessarily (7)

Reflect the staff's views (5)

EDITORIAL [Binkie Bingo]

by Max, Willow, and Mia

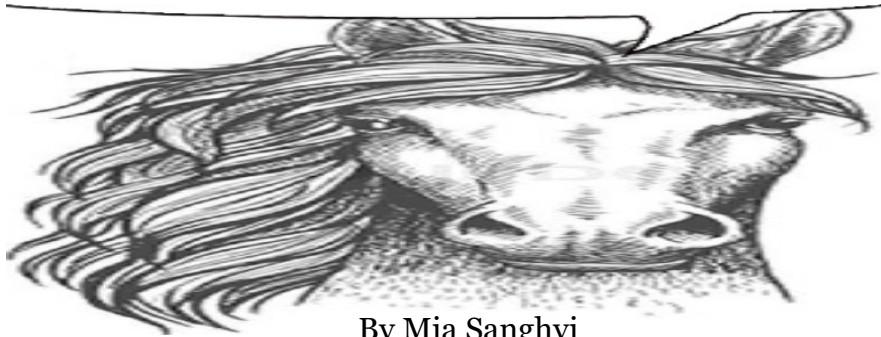
Binkie Bonko Blingo

(Or, how I found myself becoming an Omen Editor despite attending one layout)

By: Max(well) Amador-Ann Gambo



Yes



By Mia Sanghvi

Nothing Happened

By Willow Watson



SECTION SPEAK

Faculty and Staff Perspectives on Outsourcing IT to Ellucian

Writers Credited Below

Faculty Letter to the President, Treasurer, and Board of Trustees - June 6, 2023

Ed Wingenbach, President
Carl Ries, VP/Treasurer
José Fuentes, Chair of the Board of Trustees
Hampshire College

Dear Ed, Carl, and José:

We, the undersigned faculty and faculty associates, are deeply concerned about the proposal to outsource Hampshire IT to Ellucian. We understand that Hampshire is in negotiation for a five-year contract that would result in Ellucian taking on full responsibility for system management, day-to-day functions, and liability for the College's IT program.

We are centrally concerned with the fate of Hampshire's excellent IT staff, some of whom are long-time Hampshire employees. They are essential members of our community with a deep understanding of the Hampshire ethos. We all rely on their knowledge, efficiency, expertise, and impressive problem-solving skills for both routine and complex computer/network concerns and issues.

Given the outsized impact this change will have on the entire College in the upcoming months and years, we are dismayed by the administration's unilateral decision with regard to the future of Hampshire IT. We understand that no one from IT has so far seen the proposed contract nor joined in negotiations. Their exclusion, we believe, demonstrates a lack of respect for IT staff who, in recent months, have soldiered on despite increased workloads resulting from unfilled job vacancies. Moreover, it is unclear how many current IT staff will be offered positions should this contract with Ellucian be put into place.

We are aware of the strong possibility of lay-offs which we categorically oppose.

Regarding the pressure faced by the College regarding liability issues associated with information security and cyber attacks, we understand that the IT staff have been raising this as a concern for years but requests for a dedicated Network Engineer have so far gone unaddressed. One solution we see is the possibility of outsourcing just the liability associated with information security. From paper to digital (in other words, security issues that

exist beyond network systems), it makes sense to outsource the liability component to an organization that will assume that piece of the work, while we separately maintain our current in-house IT department for all other components. As well, it makes sense to hire a Chief Information Security Officer to oversee all of the College's security concerns.

The faculty urges that the contracting process with Ellucian be halted for the time being and that the administration immediately schedule a community-wide meeting to hear concerns from all sectors and reconsider this initiative. To enable the greatest possible participation, the meeting should be clearly advertised to the Hampshire community and be held in a hybrid format. If negotiations with Ellucian move forward, we also insist that, at a minimum, members of the IT Lead Team be included in all aspects of the negotiation process and that the College ensures that there will be no lay-offs nor loss of accrued benefits (sick, personal, and vacation time) to our valued, long-term employees.

SIGNED:

Margaret Cerullo	Jutta Sperling	Alan Goodman	Junko Oba
Nathalie Arnold Koenings	Sarah Partan	Faune Albert	Lailye Weidman
Becky Miller	Hope Tucker	Donna Cohn	John Slepian
Jeff Wallen	John Castorino	Kaća Bradonjić	Rachel Conrad
Laela Sayigh	Amy Jordan	Melissa Burch	Kane Stewart
Abraham Ravett	Susana Loza	Lili Kim	Roosbelinda Cardenas
Jim Wald	Karen Koehler	Ethan Tupelo	
	Ethan Ludwin-Peery	Peter Kallok	

Letter to Faculty from Jeff Butera - 8/1/2023

Dear everyone,

Ellucian met with IT staff today to explain their short and long term plans for Hampshire IT. And again their actions are questionable, as well have proven Ed Wingenbach lied to campus.

1. Ellucian is only going to have 6 full time, on campus employees at Hampshire. Ed's announcement previously stated that Ellucian would maintain "current" levels (approx 9-10).
2. All programmer and analyst positions are being eliminated. This means people like Staci Frieze, who has essentially held the college's administrative functions together through 40 years of turnover, are gone. Several others who have given you all good support - behind the scenes - are being told "there's no room for you here".
3. Ellucian intends to completely eliminate Hampshire's Evaluation platform (evals.hampshire.edu) and replace it with an off-the-shelf solution. "Other colleges have this model, Hampshire is not that unique." (Trust me, we looked high and low, and even other colleges that use narrative evaluations are different from Hampshire.) Moreover, this change has serious implications for Central Records who will be required to use multiple disparate systems to print a single transcript for a student because the data for evaluations will be stored

separately from student course registrations.

4. Ellucian will move Hampshire's Colleague instance to their SaaS hosted model. While this is a contemporary means of hosting applications, it also means Ellucian's contract for Colleague licensing will increase (eg: more revenue to Ellucian beyond what Hampshire is already paying for Colleague or IT Managed Services).

5. Gaby Richard-Harrington's position supporting Moodle is being eliminated, and the DOF office is considering adding this position to their ranks given the value and support of Faculty and Students using moodle. However, the bigger consideration is after Ed signed a contract with Ellucian, now Hampshire is adding a new FTE because Ellucian says "not necessary". More expense for Hampshire.

Ellucian is making decisions without College department heads at the table.

Students, faculty and staff deserve better.

You should be mad.

I have resigned as I cannot support these changes. I understand that leaves some long overdue changes for Evaluations incomplete - I'm sorry.

Jeff

Faculty Letter of Concern about the Outsourcing of IT to Ellucian - 9/12/2023

Before engaging in any conversation about other challenges that face us, we, members of the Hampshire College faculty, wish to formally express our dismay and deep concern about the decision to outsource IT to cloud-based software provider Ellucian, made this summer by President Ed Wingenbach and a small handful of senior leadership team advisors. This decision was made despite extremely strong, repeated, and clearly articulated opposition from staff, faculty, former employees, students, and alums across diverse constituencies. Former Hampshire College IT staff who have, in the past, worked for Ellucian and similar corporations, weighed in with warnings about control, spiraling costs, and promises that will not be kept. Faculty, staff and students repeatedly articulated the costs of outsourcing IT to our pedagogy and our spirit of community - a loss of our IT staff's precious institutional memory, expertise and deep knowledge of our unique needs and ways.

Objection to the outsourcing was strong across the community. Twenty-nine faculty members signed a letter calling for President Wingenbach to turn back before the final decision had been made. Two all-community meetings were held to discuss the potential outsourcing. At the initial meeting at the Kern Center, over 70 attendees expressed their deep objection to this plan. The same objections were clearly and powerfully made at the second meeting. Yet, casting into doubt Hampshire's long tradition of shared governance, President Wingenbach ignored the community and went forward with Ellucian.

The entire Hampshire IT staff, the majority of whom have not only accrued years of invaluable expertise but have served our community for upwards of 15 and up to 39 years, have been laid off with minimal severance. This disrespect to hardworking and dedicated staff is stark, and, we note, too, that a majority of the IT staff are mid- or late-career women, and thus particularly vulnerable in every job market. After the layoffs, IT staff were then invited to apply for jobs as Ellucian employees. The reality is that the re-written job descriptions in most cases did not align well or at all with current IT staff responsibilities and expertise, making it very difficult (and, in some cases impossible) for them to actually apply for a job. Yet, egregiously, since the end of the spring semester, IT staff have been expected to give up their knowledge, in effect teaching Ellucian

what's required of IT at Hampshire before they go. We see the decision to outsource IT to Ellucian as a blatant disregard of the hard-won expertise of longstanding Hampshire staff and as a violation of the principles of justice that have guided our community since the founding of the college.

We further note that the administration has not answered our repeated requests for clarification of the financial gain they promised outsourcing would realize. We repeat this request here, and further request clarification about Ellucian's approach to questions of liability.

In closing, we are very concerned that Hampshire's tradition of shared governance is being so easily discarded. We call on the administration to recommit to community participation as integral to decision-making, and to acknowledge the expertise of all our members, especially those likely to be most affected by any decision.

Sincerely,

Nathalie Arnold
Jim Wald
Abraham Ravett
Becky Miller
Margaret Cerullo
Alan Goodman
Laela Sayigh
Alejandro Cuellar
Viveca Greene
Peter Kallok
John Castorino
Jutta Sperling
Jeff Wallen
Karen Koehler
Sarah Partan
Carollee Bengelsdorf
Susana Loza
Frank Holmquist
Deborah Gorlin
Donna Cohn
Jennifer Bajorek
Faune Albert
Lynne Hanley
Paul Jenkins
Lailye Wideman
Lili Kim
Amy Jordan
Rachel Conrad
Daniel Schrade
CC: John Dineen, ECF Representatives

Compiled (with permission) by Jay Poggi 



by Rachel Kremer

One Last Turnip

I was asked to write a Turnip for the road, so here she is! The past year and a half supporting student groups at Hampshire College has been such a special time for me. I am so incredibly grateful for the lessons learned and memories made. Hampshire College is made up of the most amazing students doing the coolest things, and the fact that I got to be a part of that makes me so happy. Keep on clubbing (like participating in student groups) and don't forget to turnip (cook yourself a yummy meal).

Chopped Salad Kits

I don't want these submissions to seem like all I ever do is cook these fancy meals, meal prep and all these things. Life gets busy, and it is really hard for me to always find the time to get meals ready for the week or to find the mental capacity to figure out what to eat. This is where chopped salad kits come in. You can find them everywhere, though I will go out of my way to grab Target's because they have some fun and funky flavors. I usually always have chicken nuggets in the freezer and some sort of bean in my pantry, so I can add a quick protein to the salad and make it a filling meal! Remember to always give yourself a little more grace!

Put it on a Pizza

Leftovers can be boring, and it is easy to get sick of them, and nowadays anything can be a pizza. Take a look at Sibie's menu and you will see taco pizza, greek pizza, etc. Who is telling you that you can't make your own non-traditional pizza? Most grocery stores have pre-made pizza dough for around a dollar and most of the time that stuff tastes better than my 12 hour process of making homemade sourdough dough. Grab some of that, throw your leftovers on and you've got a creative way to eat your leftovers! Most of the time, an olive oil sauce will do, but if you have Thai leftovers, why not whip up a peanut sauce? Get creative with it! Carbs + anything is usually delicious!!

Sheet Pan Gnocchi

By the time this has been published, the CSA will likely be in full swing and this recipe is perfect to utilize in season vegetables. I am going to write out a base recipe but I encourage you to switch out some of the veggies too! If you want to serve this with a protein, then make this as a side, but I find it to be plenty filling without!! If you ever want to do something super fun, try making your own gnocchi. It is way easier than you think and a fun thing to do with friends!

Ingredients:

- 1 package of gnocchi
- 2 bell peppers
- 2 medium sized tomatoes
- 1 zucchini (or yellow squash)
- 1 onion
- 3 gloves of garlic
- Olive oil
- Italian seasoning
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: cheese

Directions:

- Preheat your oven to 400 and line a baking sheet with aluminum foil.
- Chop all your vegetables to be around the same size. Think about the size of a quarter
- Mince your garlic.
- All all your gnocchi, veggies and garlic to a bowl*
- Drizzle with olive oil (about 2 tablespoons if you want to measure) and give it a good toss or mix
- Add in salt, pepper and italian seasoning to taste (1/2 teaspoon of salt and pepper and 2 teaspoons of italian seasoning). Give another toss and spread on the baking sheet.
- Bake for about 25 minutes. You are looking for things to be a bit caramelized, and your gnocchi and vegetables to be soft.
- Add some parmesan cheese or any other shredded cheese (maybe nutritional yeast) and serve!

* if you want, you can do the olive oil and seasoning tossing right on the baking sheet to save some dishes, but if you want to make sure everything gets nice and coated, do it in a bowl!

Some other vegetables that would be great in this are broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, you could toss some spinach in right at the end. Really the possibilities are endless! 🐑


:(

by Alex Franzoni

What happened to the salad dressing in the kern + bridge salads???? :(🐑


Callous

by Clay Kesling

Its rough-dull-weathered-aged-decrepitly existing-Barely hanging on
Waiting for a moment of inescapable excitement-joy
In these breathless waiting periods, I trickle down the jagged rocks
Dripping through an ever-flowing creek of existence
Together-occupied-busy-unalone- but solitude prevails still
Rushing into moments of untroubled nothingness
Ample thoughts... nothing worth mulling over
A spine trembling chill but its not cold
An aching-scratching scab but no itch will suffice
A thoughtful unconsciousness from wake to sleep
A meticulously curated vision made of scribbles
A scratch-scrape-pain.Healing.Healed.Trajectory unknown.
Rough.Been through something.Trauma.Healing.Healed.Trajectory unknown.
Callous 

initial thoughts on medium

by willow watson

it could just be the fact that i'm taking four art classes at the same time, but questions about artistic mediums are really messing with my head. it seems so simple to say that the means through which ideas are expressed can affect how they are communicated, but in practice it's remarkable how the two become tied together - how assumptions & restrictions inherent to an art form can limit what can be conveyed, or how skill, effort, or understanding can impact one's ability to articulate their thoughts. more & more, i'm coming to recognize that i process my own experiences through art, & that it's essential that i am creative during my time in school in order to retain the memories that would otherwise fade over time. part of the trouble there is, of course, the way in which the medium that i choose will impact my memories. no form of expression could capture everything i want to hold onto, & the harder i try the more obvious my biases & limitations become. i don't have the style or eloquence to fully convey feeling through writing, my films lack the interactiveness & subjectivity to share all that i want to show, & every other individual form of art is too far from my reach to achieve what i want from it within the immediate future. yet no matter how painfully trite or inadequate the work i produce ends up being, i need to keep trying, to force myself to express what i can to the best of my ability, in hopes that in time i can surpass my limitations & create work that does justice to the memories & experiences that inspire me. 

A Smorgasbord of Spicy Strats to Support You in Smashing Your Starting Semester to Smithereens

or, A Survival Guide to Life at Hampshire College

by Jay Poggi

Welcome, F23s,¹ to Hampshire, and to The Omen, its most ksjdjhfksgdjhfgsd student publication. I'm Jay, currently a Div III studying game design and music, formerly co-editor of The Omen, and even formerlier than that, a wee, trembly-legged newborn baby-student at Hampshire College like you.

I came here in fall of 2021 as a transfer from Clark University. Compared to my previous college experience, my first semester at Hampshire was mind-freakingly great. I met some of my best friends, found fulfilling new creative outlets, and crammed my skull full to bursting with lessons about art, writing, and the world.

Yet when I think back on that time, I realize with hindsightly wisdom that I made a lot of mistakes, mistakes that ultimately led to me being squished into a dude-shaped stain by the big-rig-hugeness of my academic and extracurricular responsibilities.

That's why I'm writing this guide, to help you establish a healthy relationship with Hampshire from the start, so that you don't have to fix it later on like I did. We'll talk about taking control of your academics, finding a place for yourself in the community, and most importantly, how to take care of yourself through it all.²

On with the smorgasbord!

1. Embrace the Hampshire Within

During my first semester, I burnt out to so crispy a degree in part because I did every single assignment for all four of my classes exactly as instructed, even when I didn't have the time, energy, or desire to do so. Our puritanical, industrialized public education system would have us believe that this is how school is supposed to work, that "learning" means falling in line and performing tasks that other people give you. But this is Hampshire. Here, we get to shape our education.

If there's a thesis behind this guide, it's this: Hampshire is what you make of it. See, the real Hampshire was inside you all along, *and* it will be the friends you make along the way. While you may at times find yourself disappointed that Hampshire isn't the dream school you hoped it would be, with a bit of work, you can make it into that school—you can *become* that school.

Start by asking yourself **what you want from Hampshire beyond a degree**. What do you want to learn? What do you want to make? What relationships do you want to build? You ask these questions not out of some productivity-pilled grind-cellular motivation to reap the maximum value out of every moment of your time, but to break free from the way you were taught to look at school in your pre-Hampshire life.

Once you have your answers, you have a variety of tools at your disposal to achieve educational autonomy.

2. Rewrite the Social Contract

The most powerful and versatile tool is how we relate to the people around us—to professors, staff, and our fellow

1 Sorry, non-F23s, get your own Omen submission >:)

2 Of course, my perspective is limited to my own experience, so I'm sure this advice won't apply to everyone. Still, I'd be happy if this piece could help even just a few of you have a better first semester than you otherwise would.

students.

Public school conditions us to see teachers as authority figures, to relate to them as employees relate to bosses. This dynamic exists at Hampshire too, but I think it's rarely intentional. Instead, **students and professors perpetuate an authoritarian relationship by default, by subconsciously assuming it's the only kind of relationship they can have.**

Of course, it isn't. **Our relationships with professors can be just as varied and fulfilling as our relationships with our peers** (though they're never actually *like* our relationships with our peers). To establish a better dynamic, just start talking to your professors, openly and regularly, when you have questions, ideas, or concerns. Let them know when you're struggling, ask for support, and give them the benefit of the doubt that they're trying their best just like we are. **Rather than treating them as bosses, we treat them as collaborators, as mentors, as fellow human beings** (but without crossing the line that separates them from being "peers").³

Having a trusting relationship with a professor obliterates a lot of the day-to-day stress of classes. You worry less about having to force yourself through exhaustion, sickness, or life-bullshit to meet deadlines, because you know your professor cares more about your wellbeing than your punctuality. You feel more comfortable speaking up in class, because you know your professor values your contributions, even if your ideas are incomplete. You can even completely rewrite assignments together. I had a classmate last semester⁴ who wasn't in the mood to do a research paper, so they worked with the professor to design a completely different project that allowed them to work within their preferred creative mediums.

Establishing **trusting relationships with staff** is also super worthwhile. Whatever it is you might be struggling with—whether you feel like you aren't getting enough academic support, you're feeling socially isolated, or you have mice in your mod—there's probably at least one person here who would be thrilled to help you.⁵ Staff tend to respond quickly to emails, but **don't be afraid to just walk into people's offices**. Most staff work here because they *like* helping students—a visit from you could make their day.

I also think **it's worth considering how we students relate to each other**. I don't know about you, but I find being a student terribly isolating at times. That might sound weird considering what I said in the intro about making "some of my best friends" here, but despite spending nearly every waking moment of my day with those friends, as students, we're still alone. Even if we're in the same class, we each have our own assignments that we're expected to complete on our own. There's nothing stopping us from talking about our coursework, but aside from the rare group project (which almost never combine students from different classes), we're expected not to collaborate. And of course, the divisional system seems to emphasize our individual learning above all else, culminating with our Div III projects which, unless we go out of our way to recruit collaborators, damn us to ending our time at Hampshire in educational solitude.

I think this is a real shame. Easily the most valuable learning I've done here has been through collaborating with other students on extracurricular projects (usually related to student groups). I would love for professors and administrators to create more opportunities for that kind of learning in the classroom, but in the meantime, **we can create those opportunities for ourselves**.

For my part, I'm running a Discord server for the class I'm TAing for this semester. I hope this will encourage students to keep talking to each other after they leave the classroom, ask for help more often, and maybe even work on assignments together. **You can do this too, even if you aren't a TA**. Just find your classmates' emails on Moodle and send everyone an invite.⁶

3 Of course, not all professors will be open to this kind of relationship. That's why it's important to find out who is and stick with them.

4 If you're reading this, hey, I respect the heck out of you.

5 In the rare case that you have a serious issue that staff aren't addressing, don't hesitate to either go to the top (i.e. talk to Ed during his office hours, which you can find on Intranet) or get your parents involved (or both!).

6 Invite the professor too while you're at it! (Though I'd make one or two student-only channels so you can speak freely with each other.)

I'm also using my Div III project (making a new video game every week) as a chance to work with other students. I'll be co-developing most of the games with my friend Nicholas Utakis-Smith (also a Div III), and we'll be bringing our games to The Shire (Hampshire's video game club) for playtesting.⁷ I even have some Div II friends who are working together on a game development project as an independent study (which I'll describe in more detail later).

Of course, to attempt such projects, it helps to have friends. If you're a pathological introvert like me, you might struggle to make friends by just walking up to people in your hall or after class. I've found it more comfortable to socialize at loosely structured events with predetermined start and end times, which you can find through student groups.

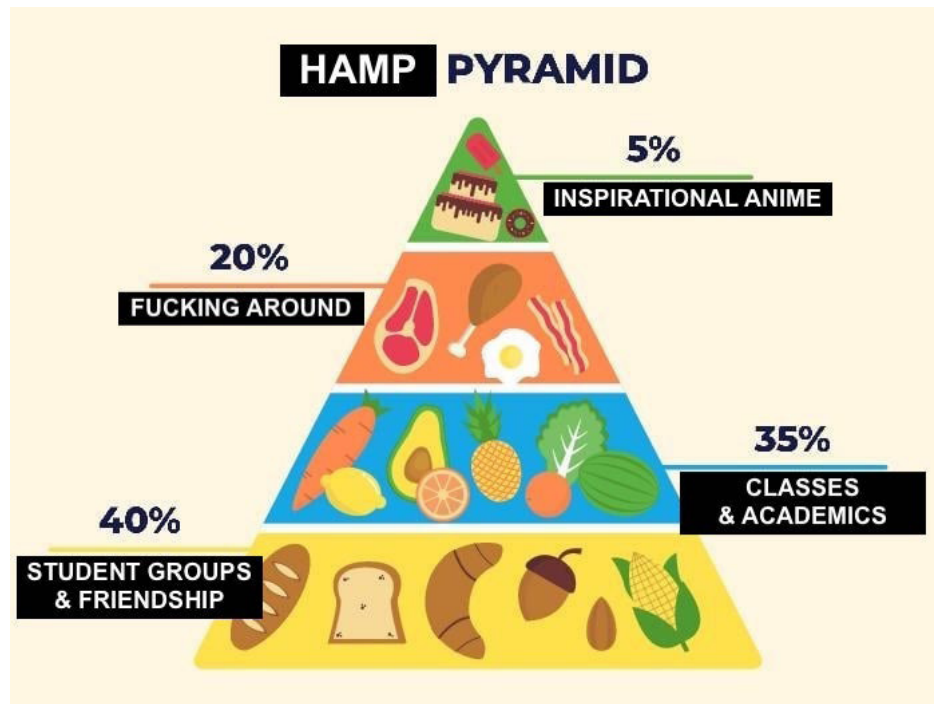


fig 1: a balanced educational diet, courtesy of Dr. Ethan Ludwin-Peery

3. Invest in Student Groups (But Don't Let Them Kill You)

Okay that was a little scarier than I meant it to be, but let me explain myself.

When I arrived at Hampshire, I lived by an unconscious rule: I would say “yes” to just about every remotely interesting opportunity that came my way. When Sean Song 19F asked me to restart Hampshire Creative Community with him, I said “yes.” When Becky Miller asked me to play fiddle in her old time string ensemble, I said “yes.” When Ida Kao 18F asked my dearly departed⁸ former co-editor Leo Zhang and I to take over The Omen, we said “yes.”

Each of these experiences ended up sort of changing my life in one way or another. HCC introduced me to Sean Song, The Hero of Our Age; playing folk music in Becky's ensemble helped me let go of my decade-long addiction to perfectionism; and The Omen saved my writing from myself, gave me my closest friends, and taught me more about human nature than any philosophy class could ever hope to. I wouldn't give up these experiences for anything.

⁷ Mondays at 6:00 PM in the Media Labs! Come try our games!

⁸ to Tokyo. They departed to Tokyo.

But it was all way, *way* too much. I was just a two-armed little guy, and I was spending every day carrying about three billion pounds. It's no wonder I ended up squished.

My advice to you, dear F23s, is to say “yes,” **but also “no.”** Use this first semester to sample as many of Hampshire's extracurricular offerings as you can; but once you start considering taking on some kind of responsibility, ask yourself what you actually have to give. How much time can you afford to spare without it impacting your health, your academics, or your social life? And, of equal importance, how much mental energy do you have to carry all the tasks this job would require of you? When I co-ran HCC with Sean, I only did about two hours of work on it each week, but I was constantly burning a little bit of my increasingly limited mind-fuel to remember to put in the purchase order on *x* day call in the food at *y* time. On top of everything else I had going on, it meant my brain-car⁹ was just about always running on an empty tank.

Here's where I want to advise you to say “no” if you think you can't handle another responsibility. But I know from experience that you can almost never tell how much of a burden a commitment will be before you're chin-deep in commitment-gunk, so my actual advice is to let yourself say “no” even *after* you've already said “yes.”

If you're determined to say “yes,” make sure to **get in the habit of asking for help**. Get support from staff as often as you can. Make sure tasks are delegated among you and your fellow club-runners equitably as opposed to equally (“from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs,” as it were). Let yourself miss deadlines if it means you get a good night's sleep.¹⁰

If you find yourself wanting to dedicate more time and energy than you have to one of your extracurricular activities, you're in luck. Hampshire offers a way of creating some much needed space in both your schedule and your brain without involving time travel or lobotomies.

4. Take as Many Independent Studies (and/or Special Projects) as You Can

I'll start this section on independent studies by quoting from two essays about independent studies that I wrote last semester as part of an independent study:

An **independent study** is a student-designed project supervised by a faculty member that is considered “equivalent to a semester-long course” (in other words, it takes place during the semester, grants four academic credits, and counts toward being considered a full-time student). Independent studies can be literally anything, as long as the student spends “the equivalent of approximately 180 hours engaged in academic work”, and their faculty supervisor and advisor sign off on it. Contrary to what the name suggests, **students can do independent studies in groups**, as long as each student fills out their own form, gets approved, and puts in the required number of hours.

The most awesome power of an independent study is its ability to transmute something you're already doing into academic credit. I've been spending 6+ hours a week on work for The Omen since October of 2021, and I only just started getting credit for it this semester. Don't be like me. The learning you feel inspired to do in your free time is the most valuable of all, and Hampshire should acknowledge it.

A **special project** is a lot like an independent study in that it's a self-designed, 180-hour academic activity that counts for four credits. It differs in that it can take place at any time during the year, on campus or off campus, and it is supervised by someone *other* than a Hampshire faculty member or student. The supervisor could be the student's boss at an internship, a mentor leading community work, a Hampshire staff person, or anyone the student's advisor considers to be “a qualified supervisor”.

9 These metaphors are getting out of hand.

10 This applies to class too. Seriously, no assignment is worth an all-nighter.

... for reasons logistical, accreditation, and silly, **[special projects] do not count toward being considered full-time.** However, because **you can do them at any time of the year**, a summer or winter special project could get you out of having to take a fourth class during a semester.

These passages are from a series of essays I wrote this past spring called “*The Re-Remaking of a College*,” in which I proposed ways that students, staff, and faculty alike could make Hampshire a better, more progressive school.¹¹ I’d been planning these essays in my head as early as fall of 2022, but with a full courseload and a chronically fatigued corporeal form, I just didn’t have the time.

Thankfully, with the guidance of Deathfest’s Archlich and Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology Ethan Ludwin-Peery, I was able to turn it into an independent study. This meant the project no longer conflicted with my academics—it *was* my academics. That semester was the first time since coming to Hampshire where I felt like my level of stress bordered on “healthy” most of the time.

I really can’t recommend independent studies enough.¹² Taking on a lot of responsibility for a club? Make it an independent study. Have a personal project that you want to work on so badly it keeps you up at night? Make it an independent study. Just had enough of syllabuses and homework? Do an independent study!

The trouble is, each independent study needs a faculty supervisor, and it’s unlikely that first-semester students will have enough trust established with any professors to convince them to take a chance on your idea. That’s why **I wish Hampshire would offer a course on designing your own projects to Div Is so they could at least get a taste for the freedom that independent studies offer.**¹³

Alas, there’s always next semester.

5. Know the Difference Between “Advocacy” and “Direct Action”

As Hampshire students, we’re predisposed to giving way more shits about our school than most. To many of us, this place represents not just a path to future employment, but a set of ideals about the way the world ought to be. It’s no wonder, then, that when something goes wrong at Hampshire, we feel compelled to do something about it.

Let’s take this past summer as an example. Shortly after the end of last semester, Hampshire announced it would be outsourcing IT services to Ellucian, a for-profit company. Not only would this change put the quality, reliability, and cost of Hampshire’s future IT services into question, it would mean **laying off all of Hampshire’s current IT staff**,¹⁴ some of whom had worked here for decades. The administration made this decision despite consistent warnings from faculty and IT staff¹⁵ about the numerous ways in which entering a contract with Ellucian would cause harm—not just to the staff who would lose their jobs, but to the school as a whole.

Many in the community tried to fight back. An alum started a petition that reached over 1,000 signatures. IT staff shared background information and calls to action on Intranet. Other community members used Instagram and Discord to spread the word. I don’t have exact numbers, but I’m sure Ed and the Board of Trustees received

I I You can read it here! (tinyurl.com/re-remaking) It’s basically a more in-depth version of this piece.

I 2 I would probably be giving special projects more attention here if I’d ever had the chance to do one :/

I 3 In the past, they’ve offered a similar class called “Supported Project Seminar,” but it was in the spring, and I don’t think it’s being taught this semester.

I 4 The administration initially claimed current IT staff would be able to apply for similar positions with Ellucian, but in reality, Ellucian only offered 6 positions, and there were 10 Hampshire IT staff. Plus, many of the new positions didn’t match neatly with the old ones, leaving some Hampshire IT staff without a new job to apply to. For these reasons, and because some chose to resign (quite reasonably, I might add), only one original Hampshire IT staff member will remain once the transition is finalized on 10/11 (stay awesome, Amanda).

I 5 some examples of which you can find in this issue of The Omen

a ludicrous number of emails urging them to reconsider.

But none of it worked. They went through with the contract, and we're on track to spend at least the next five years with Ellucian.

I've seen (and participated in) many attempts at activism during my time at Hampshire, and most were examples of **advocacy**, where constituents try to convince those in power to do something. While advocacy can be a good starting point, we need to recognize its fatal flaw: **those in power can just say "no."** That's what happened over the summer. It didn't matter that the entire community was united against the switch to Ellucian. The administration had already made up their minds.

Instead of relying solely on advocacy, we need to start using **direct action**, which means **going over admin's heads and just doing the thing**.

Here's an example: I'm sure you've noticed that Hampshire's housing options kinda suck. They've got chipped paint, faulty appliances, and—let's be real—probably mold, like, everywhere.¹⁶ If we used advocacy—talked to housing, talked to Ed, made petitions, sent emails en masse—we could maybe get facilities to clean up the most egregiously health-code-violating places on campus. But Hampshire's cheap, so I doubt they'd invest in the large-scale renovations that the dorms and mods really need.

The direct action approach would be to organize a group of volunteers to fix up the residences independently. Instead of spending weeks begging the administration to act, only to receive a fraction of what we asked for, we could just start doing the work that needs to be done.

The obvious issue is that this sort of endeavor would take an extraordinary amount of time and effort from a perpetually busy student body. That's where the previous Spicy Strats come into play. Students could turn their involvement in the—uh, let's call it the "Fix Up the College Committee" (FUCC for short)—into an independent study or special project so it wouldn't compete as much with their academics. If professors got involved, they could plan on having a few assignment-free weeks each semester to allow the committee to focus solely on its renovation work. The FUCC could even accept donations or start a mutual aid network to make sure members are getting their financial needs met.

Of course, the best outcome would be for the administration to take notice and turn the FUCC into some kind of official school activity that would count as work study and provide academic course credit. But even without official approval, I think the community could lend enough support to make this sort of thing sustainable.

Direct action could help us with the Ellucian situation too. We might not be able to reverse the decision, but we could form a FUCC-like group to provide community-run IT services including repairs, a device library, and websites that actually cater to the specialized needs of Hampshire College (unlike the "off-the-shelf" websites that Ellucian provides). With enough support, a group like this could functionally replace Ellucian, forcing admin to find a way out of the contract lest they waste the school's money on services no one is using.

...

Those are the Spiciest Strats this shamefully mild Div III could muster. Feel free to contact me at jawp21@hampshire.edu or @wakerofwinds on Discord if you want to talk about anything related to the thought-puke I just threw up at your feet. Until then, I—wait, shit! I forgot the most important Strat!

SUBMIT TO THE OMEN

ow pewish :3



¹⁶ They're also utterly inaccessible, which is arguably the biggest problem. I only omitted this from the main paragraph because I don't think it would be responsible for me to encourage students to build their own elevators.

Every Song in Glee and Whether or not it's better than the Original: Season 1A

by Finch Arnold

I am one of the foremost Glee scholars of our age, unfortunately for me, and I will be putting that knowledge to use here. Songs will be judged by sound only, choreography and place in the plot will not be factored into the song's ranking, though I may still discuss them if they prove interesting. Vocals will be the primary factor considered, but the instrumentation will be evaluated if it differs sufficiently between the two versions. Only the songs that were also released as singles will get ranked because there's already so many of them even if I exclude snippets. For mashups the song will be given a ranking for each of its constituent songs. The episodes covered will be "Pilot" (S1E1) through "Sectionals" (S1E13) because there are so ungodly many songs on this show that this would be genuinely 25 pages if I didn't split the season up. Also I don't really know about music so this is basically just based on whatever sounds best to me. Also also I reserve the right to break my own rules.

Episode 1: Pilot

Song: On My Own, originally performed by Frances Ruffelle

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry

Winner: Original

Here we hit one obstacle here. Glee does a lot of showtunes, and in the originals the actors aren't just singing, they're also acting, while Glee tends to aim for a purely vocal performance. Here, I'd say the original beats out Glee exactly because of the focus on acting. The higher emotion in Ruffelle's voice makes it stand out, while Lea's voice is objectively quite good but decidedly bland. You do start to see the writers' biases as soon as the pilot, interestingly. Mercedes, Kurt, and Tina all get their audition songs as 10 second snippets and Artie's isn't even shown until a flashback in the final season.

Song: Can't Fight This Feeling, originally performed by REO Speedwagon

Glee Performer: Finn Hudson

Winner: Original

The original completely washes the cover here, unfortunately. Monteith just doesn't have any of the power REO Speedwagon has, it's a classic for a reason.

Song: Rehab, originally performed by Amy Winehouse

Glee Performer: Vocal Adrenaline

Winner: Original

All style, no substance. Completely lacks anything good about the original song.

Song: Leaving On a Jet Plane, originally performed by John Denver

Glee Performer: Will Schuester

Winner: Original

I hate listening to Schue's voice even when it's not bad. At least he's not rapping in this one. It's hard to say what doesn't work in the cover but I think it's down to Matthew Morrison's voice not really fitting the song at all.

Song: Don't Stop Believin', originally performed by Journey

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

I do like the Glee version of this, even though Lea's voice is ill-suited for it and it is basically just a Finn/Rachel duet, one of many. It really does hit a lot of the best parts of Glee, and I find it very nostalgic, even though I didn't actually watch Glee when it was coming out on account of being four at the time. That makes this the first one that isn't immediately obvious. Ultimately, the tiebreaker here is going to be the instrumentation, the semi a capella nature of the Glee version doesn't have the sauce that Journey's has.

Episode 2: Showmance

Song: Gold Digger, originally performed by Kanye West

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

Will Schue is rapping in this, enough said. Artie and Mercedes are great in this, but not great enough. I promise the cover versions will get better.

Song: Push It, originally performed by Salt-N-Pepa

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

The original gets ahead almost entirely because it uses a different arrangement, which is better. Also the vocals on the Glee version kind of sound like shit.

Song: I Say A Little Prayer, originally performed by Dionne Warwick

Glee Performer: Quinn Fabray

Winner: Original

Quinn has to have the most underused voice on the entire show, and it shines here. However, despite it being a single, it does not have an extended version and is thus only half a song. The original wins by default.

Song: Take A Bow, originally performed by Rihanna

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry

Winner: Original

I think I might just not like giving Lea Michelle anything. Imagine what Mercedes could've done with this song.

Episode 3: Acafellas

Song: Mercy, originally performed by Duffy

Glee Performer: Vocal Adrenaline

Winner: Original

Vocal Adrenaline has no good covers. They're the KidzBop of Glee. Yes, this extends to their most notable member once he finally shows up, though he won't appear here; he's only in the season's second half, thankfully for me because I can't stand him.

Song: Bust Your Windows, originally performed by Jazmine Sullivan

Glee Performer: Mercedes Jones

Winner: Glee

Amber Riley, ladies and gentlemen! This cover is just impeccable. Obviously Mercedes' vocals are impeccable, she could spin straw into gold, but you also can't leave out the insane editing at the beginning, the four separate shots of her breaking that window are beyond iconic.

Song: I Want To Sex You Up, originally performed by Color Me Badd

Glee Performer: The Acafellas

Winner: Original

Go away Will Schue!

Episode 4: Preggers

Song: Taking Changes, originally performed by Celine Dion

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry

Winner: Original

Unrelated, but this is the only single in Preggers. Isn't that kind of wild? This has way more sauce than previous Rachel ballads, it's the only one so far that isn't clearly worse.

Episode 5: The Rhodes Not Taken

Song: Maybe This Time, originally performed by Liza Minelli

Glee Performer: Kristin Chenoweth as April Rhodes and Rachel Berry

Winner: Glee

God Chenoweth is so good in this. Rachel's performance almost doesn't factor into this ranking at all, it's strictly Kristin v. Liza, and I think Chenoweth pulls ever so slightly ahead, though it really couldn't be closer.

Song: Alone, originally performed by Heart

Glee Performer: April Rhodes and Will Schuester

Winner: Original

Schue is just too bad! I want to give Kristin the flowers she deserves but a duet that's half amazing and half mid is just not cutting it when the original song is two halves good. We get so little April and we're wasting her on Will Schuester duets!

Song: Last Name, originally performed by Carrie Underwood

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

This is one of the closest matches yet, to the point of me almost declaring it a tie.

Song: Somebody To Love, originally performed by Queen

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

This is a pretty good cover, but it's not even close, come on.

Episode 6: Vitamin D

Song: It's My Life/Confessions Part II, originally performed by Bon Jovi/Usher

Glee Performer: New Directions Boys

Winner: Glee/Glee

Vitamin D is such a stacked episode for songs. Finn is absolutely on point, it's one of his strongest performances and I feel isn't nearly discussed enough. The one issue I can point at is a lack of cohesion, Confessions isn't very woven in. It's My Life very much dominates the song.

Song: Halo/Walking On Sunshine, originally performed by Beyoncé/Katrina and the Waves

Glee Performer: New Directions Girls

Winner: Original/Glee

Another juggernaut of a song, this is one of the few Rachel performances that really works for me. Maybe they should drug her more often. It has a pretty wildly different energy to Halo though, so ultimately Beyoncé's greater power prevails there.

Episode 7: Throwdown

Song: Hate On Me, originally performed by Jill Scott

Glee Performer: Sue's Kids

Winner: Glee

Throwdown is a really funny episode because Sue is objectively correct and then it just never gets addressed again. Case in point, we have a second demonstration of Mercedes' power.

Song: No Air, originally performed by Jordin Sparks featuring Chris Brown

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

It's hard to describe how Lea Michelle's voice starts to sound in large doses. It starts to sound almost autotuned, even though you know intellectually that it isn't autotuned. It's especially bad in Season 1 because Blaine wasn't there until the next season and they weren't regularly giving songs to Santana or Kurt or Mercedes yet so there's so so much Rachel. Saying that, Chris Brown is a deeply untalented man so the crown must unfortunately go to our illiterate queen.

Song: You Keep Me Hangin' On, originally performed by The Supremes

Glee Performer: Quinn Fabray

Winner: Glee

The life and times of Quinn Fabray are truly a modern tragedy. Never has a character been so wasted by the narrative, so unfairly maligned. If I didn't know better I might think Ryan Murphy could have a problem with women! And Season 1 is the season where they're *nice* to her, it only gets worse from here. Dianna Agron's voice is just so effortless, is the best word I can think of for it.

Song: Keep Holding On, originally performed by Avril Lavigne

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

Do the Glee writers know that they don't have to make *everything* a Rachel/Finn duet? Nonetheless, this one did genuinely work for me, though how much of that is as a result of Quinn acting her heart out I can't say.

Episode 8: Mash-Up

Song: Bust A Move, originally performed by Young MC

Glee Performer: Mr. Schue and New Directions

Winner: Original

This is such a creepy song for a high school teacher to be singing! I hate this man more than should be humanly possible!

Song: The Thong Song, originally performed by Sisqó

Glee Performer: Mr. Schue

Winner: Original

I did not know this had an extended version until literally now! This is a legitimate contender for worst performance in the show, and that includes the deliberately bad ones. The best part is probably when he calls Emma's dress "scandalous". Her wedding dress. While he is married and she is engaged. Both to different people. Maybe Terri did nothing wrong!

Song: Sweet Caroline, originally performed by Neil Diamond

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

The episode Mash-Up contains zero mashups. Also, this song is bad. I don't like listening to Puck sing, and not just for the obvious reason!

Song: I Could Have Danced All Night, originally performed by Julie Andrews

Glee Performer: Emma Pillsbury

Winner: Original

I like Emma's voice a lot, and she's super underused. But it's Julie Andrews, so she's unfortunately up against hopeless odds.

Episode 9: Wheels

Song: Dancing With Myself, originally performed by Billy Idol

Glee Performer: Artie Abrams

Winner: Original

Why did they go acoustic for this? It sounds much worse than the original.

Song: Defying Gravity, originally performed by Idina Menzel

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry and Kurt Hummel

Winner: Original

Neither of them is touching Idina. Neither of them is even getting close to that. For what it's worth, however, I'd argue that Kurt is better than Rachel here.

Song: Proud Mary, originally performed by Ike and Tina Turner

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

Unique choreography aside, bland.

Episode 10: Ballad

Song: Endless Love, originally performed by Lionel Richie and Diana Ross

Glee Performer: Will Schuester and Rachel Berry

Winner: Original

What an *awful* subplot.

Song: I'll Stand By You, originally performed by The Pretenders

Glee Performer: Finn Hudson

Winner: Original

This is one of those where both versions are pretty good, but the cover just feels off here. Close, but not quite there.

Song: Don't Stand So Close To Me/Young Girl, originally performed by The Police/Gary Puckett & The Union Gap

Glee Performer: Will Schuester

Winner: Original

It's fitting that this was originally sung by The Police, because they really ought to get in touch with Will Schuester sometime soon.

Song: Crush, originally performed by Jennifer Paige

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry

Winner: Original

I just don't know why anyone would write a storyline like this.

Song: (You're) Having My Baby, originally performed by Paul Anka and Odia Coates

Glee Performer: Finn Hudson

Winner: Glee

Stay with me here! I was shocked too! The scene this song appears in is a complete mess and it's amazing, but it's not a bad performance per se. Also, the original song kind of sucks, it's lethargic and oddly morose.

Song: Lean On Me, originally performed by Bill Withers

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

Sometimes I find I have very little to talk about with a pair of songs. Neither here is terribly noteworthy, if one was better or one was worse we could talk, but both are merely okay.

Episode 11: Hairography

Song: Bootylicious, originally performed by Destiny's Child

Glee Performer: Jane Addams Girls Choir

Winner: Original

One of the characters that performs this song is named "Aphasia" which is in fact a type of brain damage and a generally odd baby name. Learning this was the most singular moment of joy I felt doing this entire project, which has rapidly become an albatross around my neck. Nonetheless, it's not enough for a victory here.

Song: Don't Make Me Over, originally performed by Dionne Warwick

Glee Performer: Mercedes Jones

Winner: Glee

The original failed to impress me. The cover failed not to.

Song: Papa Don't Preach, originally performed by Madonna

Glee Performer: Quinn Fabray

Winner: Original

Another one with no full version that loses by default, unfortunately. Why release it as a single if you're not going to do an extended version?

Song: Crazy In Love/Hair, originally performed by Beyoncé/Cast of Hair

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original/Original

This really didn't need to be a mashup. Imagine if they had done a full version of Crazy In Love, Mercedes would've destroyed that. Also, no extended version! It's a minute and a half I can't exactly give the win to a song that's a minute and a half

Song: Imagine, originally performed by John Lennon

Glee Performer: Haverbrook Deaf Choir and New Directions

Winner: Glee

This is a level of kindness and sincerity that a show like Glee literally never shows so I have to hand it to them here. Also I hate John Lennon. I hate him a lot.

Song: True Colors, originally performed by Cyndi Lauper

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

This is somehow the first (and last) Tina solo in the entire first season even though she's in every episode. For risk of sounding a tad out of touch, I really don't like the original very much.

Episode 12: Mattress

Song: Smile, originally performed by Lily Allen

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry and Finn Hudson

Winner: Original

I despise the fake British accent Rachel is doing in this song. Though, I don't care for this song as a whole. She sounds like she's phoning it in the whole time. This is one of the more slept on bad songs

of Glee, probably because it's not bad in a way that's particularly interesting or funny.

Song: Jump, originally performed by Van Halen

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

Mercedes changed lives here but the rest of the cast is really failing to hold up their end of things.

Song: Smile, originally performed by Nat King Cole

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

Yes, they really did two different songs named Smile in one episode. It made things very confusing for me. Some of these I really have nothing to say about. The original was kind of boring what else do you want from me

Episode 13: Sectionals

Song: And I'm Telling You I'm Not Going, originally performed by Jennifer Hudson

Glee Performer: Mercedes Jones

Winner: Glee

Many Glee characters have their iconic songs. Most characters wouldn't see their most iconic performances until Season 2, where, in my professional opinion, the average quality of the songs improves drastically (probably because it's when they decided to start giving Santana songs) but Mercedes hits hard right out of the gate. It's not her best song, that's in Season 3, but it's her most iconic, and for good reason.

Song: Don't Rain On My Parade, originally performed by Barbra Streisand

Glee Performer: Rachel Berry

Winner: Glee

I REALLY hate to give it to her but this is THE Rachel Berry song. It's hard to not be blown away by it, it plays to all of her strengths and she gives it her all. And then she actually got cast in Funny Girl, as the prophecy foretold, and performed a version of it that's actually worse, in my opinion. It's not her best song, that's in Season 3, but it's her most iconic, and for good reason. A lot of characters have their best songs in seasons two and three; those really can't come soon enough so I finally have something substantive to discuss.

Song: You Can't Always Get What You Want, originally performed by The Rolling Stones

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Glee

This might be controversial but I honestly don't find the original to be very good at all. The cover's pretty good, though not great, but the badness of the original is key here.

Song: My Life Would Suck Without You, originally performed by Kelly Clarkson

Glee Performer: New Directions

Winner: Original

What's with the long song titles in this episode? All the songs in this one are full sentences. Anyways, no force is going to outdo Kelly Clarkson. Did any of y'all listen to her new album? It was really good you guys should listen to Chemistry.



SECTION LIES

How could you peachtray me?

by Lucas Brisbois

Oh my most lovely of peach tea
Given to me by my family
but now you have forsaken me

I went to sip
But then you slip
Upon my table
So I'm unable

To drink you 🐑



Write your own poem!

by Violet Gibson

Draw your path through the words and make your own work of literary art!

You can use the same words more than once.

Ideal utensils include a pen, a marker, a dried slug, ashes, or cerebrospinal fluid.

free	tried	accompany	of	do
now	jump	automatic	change	shit
and	column	force	disembowelment	halfway
look	death	human	connect	love
rest	hers	cement	like	fluorescent
more	was	control	an	then
ghost	forgotten	pelican	standard	something
over	slay	no	alive	got
number	palindrome	for	be	abhorrent
they	got	discount	difference	you
part	decompose	orange	resent	to
fire	flushed	with	about	out



The intergalactic adventures of a youth choir through time and space

by Sole Williams-Brewer

Professor Miller
HACU: Writing About Music
4/20/2023

The intergalactic adventures of a youth choir through time and space

Far far away, beyond the time of today's space travel, there lived a certain youth choir that was very friendly and outgoing with each other. They loved to sing, dance, and perform together. Right now, they are currently getting ready for a Klebmas concert to end off the year 3029. This is an annual event for the students and a very fun one at that. In the midst of their excitement, they talk to themselves about their lives and what they hope to accomplish in the near future:

But before we do, allow me to introduce our young protagonists. There is Kenny, the very optimistic baritone who is a bit of a trickster. Then there is Imari, one of his best friends. He's also outgoing, but a bit more reserved. Then, there's Anaya. She has a very loud and powerful voice and she aspires to become an opera singer someday. They are all currently headed from regular classes to choir practice on their hoverboards:

ring ring* *ring ring* the bell chimed

The signal for the teens to transition from regular classes to choir practice had just sounded. The group did not go together, but rather in pairs and groups of three. one group, in particular, was very excited for today's rehearsal:

But before we do, allow me to introduce our young protagonists. There is Kenny, the very optimistic baritone who is a bit of a trickster.

"Man, I wonder what Ms. V will have us practice today," Kenny exclaims.

"Probably the same thing we've always practiced," Imari says. "It's almost Winter Break and we all have to get ready for the Klebmas concert."

"Oh, riiiiight," Kenny said. "I almost forgot that was happening."

Imari stares at him. Then Anaya comes up behind and says,

"Guys, guys!" she exclaims. "I know it's almost time for break, but we still have to stay focused."

"Roger that!" Kenny says.

Anaya facepalms.

“Which means that we need to stay on top of our normal studies as well as our music studies.”

The other two look at each other quizzically.

“Let’s talk about it when we’re there.” She says finally.

“Yes, ma’am,” the two boys reply

And so the three of them hoverboard to class in earnest, confident about the practice ahead.

When the trio arrives, they are the first ones there besides Sole and Sedreck. They take their seats and briefly go over their sheet music. While going over their sheet music, they hear someone else coming in:

“Hi, guys!” Kylie exclaims, shouting her arrival at the top of her lungs.

“Hey, Kylie!” Anaya greets . “Mind keeping it down at notch? We’re trying to go over our music.”

“Right! Sorry about that. I’m just a bit more excited than usual today.”

“Oh, really? How so?”

“Because I got a new job today!”

Anaya perked up at the sound of that.

“Oh, how wonderful!” she exclaimed. “What’s your job?”

“A jolly smelf,” Kylie said. “I’m singing carols with a chamber group later on today.”

*play on words of elf and the name of Santa Klaus’ helpers

“Sounds good!” Anaya says. “Hopefully that doesn’t conflict with our concert,”

“Oh no, it won’t,” Kylie reassures. “I made sure of it! The leader of the street choir said that we will only be singing from the 17th to the 22nd, not the 24th.”

“Did you tell Ms. V yet?” Imari asks.

“Yes, and she also knows that the schedules don’t conflict.”

“That’s good to hear,” Imari says. “The last thing *we* need is *our* conductor gett8ng upset over last minute arrangements.”

“Oh come on, guys,” Sedreck interrupts. “Y’all know that Ms. V is *not* that scary. You’re overthinking things!”

The rest of the group looks at each other.

“Just stay focused and let every practice from now on run its course”

“Ight, Sed. Whatever ya say,” Imari says.

The rest of the group file into the class one op by one. Towards the end of a season *almost* everyone has the tendency to trickle in at the last minute. Which is a trait that Ms. V isn’t particularly fond of.

Meanwhile, Kenny and Sole are catching up on life, something that they haven’t had the opportunity to do in a while.

December 24th, 3029

Earth stage emporium

The choir is singing their last song of the Klebmas season onstage

“In the niiights, Dream delight. I want to see you standing there! Winter niiights, Dream delight. I found someone who really cares!”

The crowd stands up and erupts in applause! All choir members take a bow together and exit stage left.

“That was amazing!” Kenny said. “We killed that performance!”

“You bet!” Anaya answered. “We’re unstoppable!”

Just then, their choir conductor Ms. V stops them in their tracks.

“Hey, everyone!” she says. “I know you all have had a long night and are looking forward to going back home for the holidays, but before you do, I have a little announcement to make.”

The students look at each other in earnest. Their conductor has never asked them to stop unless it was for an emergency. They promptly file into their rehearsal room, where they were just a few hours prior. Once there, they notice a *cameroni ready to record them.

“Is this like the Letre recording we did?” Sole asked.

“No, It’s different.” Ms. V said. “Very different.”

The students looked up in earnest once more.

“You have all been accepted to participate in the Universal Choir Games this upcoming summer!”

The students were flabbergasted at first.

“Now, I know that this is a lot to take in, but I’ve known you all for years now and I know that you can do it!”

Then, they cheered excitedly for joy, happy about the opportunity that they were just given.

“We’ll start practice after you all get off break and go from there! Expect an email from me in the next couple of weeks.”

“Alright!” they replied!

As they walked out the door in high spirits, they started to chat amongst themselves about the future yet to come.

*a species of alien with a built in camera lens in it’s eyes

Klebmas passed, and soon enough, the choir was back to work on their usual schedule. But there was one significant change: they were now preparing for the Universal Choir Games. With this new shift in motivation, Ms. V was as encouraging as ever. The choir appreciated her shift in tone, but they were also very suspicious of their conductor’s change in attitude:

At the beginning of the period, the students shifted into the choir room one by one, excited about upcoming preparations:

“Hey, Imari!” Kenny said, “How was your Klebmas?”

“It was a’ight,” Imari said. “I wrote a song about wanting to kill Santa Klaus. Wanna hear it?”

“Sure I do!” Kenny said. “U-drop it to me later, will ya?”

“Sure thing!” Imari said.

Soon enough, rehearsal started:

*insert rehearsal scene.

“Alright, class! That’s a wrap!” Ms. V announced after their final song of the afternoon practice. “Be sure to get lots of rest! We have a big day tomorrow!”

The first rehearsal went off without a hitch! The students had to go over songs that they had already performed

while also learning new ones.

The new songs that they had learned were among the most important, Ms. V had told them:

“Alright, guys. Let’s go over Non Nobis one last time,”

You’re describing the after again. What happened during?

During the first rehearsal, the choir members were very excited to go over new and old repertoire.

“Alright, class. We’ll start with Non Nobis and go from there!”

“Yes, ma’am!” the choir responded.

The eager cooperation of the choir was self-evident, as they dived into the material headfirst! They sang several of the songs that they knew with zero interruption, only going back through once or twice to fix a few errors.

“Alright, that sounded good, but the baritones did sound a little flat on the bridge. Let’s try that again.”

Sedreck and Imari whisper to each other briefly.

“Um, Ms. V?” Imari answers. “Sedreck says he’s not feeling well right now. Can you excuse him?”

“I understand. You may be excused,” Ms. V. said. “Does anyone else need to leave?”

The students shook their heads.

“Good! Let’s continue!”

The rest of the rehearsal was smooth sailing from then on out. Towards the end, Sedreck comes back feeling refreshed and energized.

“So, did you find out what was wrong?” Imari asks with concern

“Yeah, I was just dehydrated. After drinking some water and having a quick Nova cleanse, I feel a lot better!”

“Phew! I was worried that your mask had broke or somethin! Don’t scare me like that man!”

“Ay, you know I’m tougher than that! I can take care of myself while still being there for everyone.” Sedreck affirms

“I know you like being there for everyone here, but you also have to be there for yourself! We can’t do this without you!” Kylie chimes in.

“Alright Kylie, I will.” Sedreck replies

“Alright, class! That’s going to be all for today! Have a good night!”

“Thanks! Bye, Ms. V.” the class responds, while walking out the door.

“Sedreck, can you stay behind for me, please?”

“Uh, sure?” Sedreck asks.

The two of them sit down in the choir room to talk.

“Thank you for coming back today, Sedreck. You didn’t have to, In fact, I would have been completely fine with you leaving to take care of yourself. So why did you come back?” I hope you feel better soon.”

Sedreck looks at her quizzically.

“I’d say that something’s more off about *you* than *me* Ms. V. Are you alright?”

Ms. V. puts a hand to her head.

“Yes, I’m good. Have a good night.”

“If you say so, Ms. V” Sedreck says, and walks out the door, unsure if his conductor is truly alright.

Ms. V. is left alone once more.

Rehearsal 2: Ms. V and Sedreck talk

The second rehearsal went smoothly without any interruptions! The class practiced all of their songs in tune with each other. After rehearsal was done Ms. V. said:

“Alright, you guys are dismissed for the evening!”

Then she comes up to Sedreck and says:

“Sedreck, we need to talk. For real this time.”

“Are you sure?” Sedreck asked, unsure if his conductor was prepared to dismiss him again,

“I’m sure,” Ms. V. said. “I’m ready to explain everything.”

“Alright.” Sedreck said.

With that, the two of them go to the choir room after class. When they get there, Ms. V. stars automatically with her point:

“So, Sedreck, I see that last time I was unable to let you know what was going on with me.

“Yeah, that’s right.” Sedreck said “Are you feeling better now.”

“Indeed I am,” Ms. V said. “But there’s something I need to tell you.”

“What is it?”

“I’m nervous about the costs of the spacecraft.”

“That’s it?” Sedreck asked. “Why?”

“Because I am aware that the grant that we’re about to receive isn’t big enough to pay for a spacecraft that’s big enough for all of you. We’re still 12000 tehas short.”

“12000 tehas!?” Sedreck exclaimed. “No way! That’ll be a breeze to raise! Just give me and the gang a few months to raise the money. We’ll be ready by then!”

“Don’t be too sure,” Ms. V. Said. “It is a daunting task”

“Aw, you know better than to doubt *me* Ms. V!” Sedreck remarked, giving a slight smile

Ms. V smiled back. “Very well, Sedreck. You and the rest of the choir can raise the money for the spacecraft. Good luck.”

Sedreck hops up to give Ms. V a hug. “Aww, thanks, Ms. V! I won’t let you down!”

With that, he runs out the door, happy to make a difference for his conductor and his friends.

Scene 4: Preparations for the trip

Later that night, Sedreck pings the choir’s group chat with a certain message:

“Hey, guys! I know that the trip is upon us, but there’s something else that we gotta do: we need to make sure that we raise enough money for the spacecraft we’re going in! My house: 100:00: let’s meet tonight to talk!”

The group returned to Sedreck’s house, a lofty, bean shaped hut sitting between two trees. When the group got there, they sat down and made their action plan:

“We all know that we have to bring something to the table in order for this to work. So, whaddaya got?”

“Well, Kylie and I were thinking of starting a bake sale” Sole exclaims

“Alright, good start,” Sedreck says. “What else?”

“We could do a car wash?” Imari says. “It’ll be fun and helpful, especially with spring right around the corner.”

“Nice, nice!” Sedreck says “Any more ideas?”

The rest of the group falls silent for a few moments. Then Jessica says,

“I’m not sure if this is a profitable idea, but I’ve always wanted to start my own magazine. It will be a multimedia collection of all of the happenings in the solar system.”

“Jessica, that sounds awesome!” Johnathan says. “”I’d love to help!”

“Same here!” Sedreck says.

Scene 5: Final Embarkment

A few months passed since the first rehearsal and the choir was now ready for their grand adventure! They raised funds for the spacecraft through multiple services that the students had led on their own: Kenny, Imari, and Anaya started a car wash, Kylie and Sole started a bake sale, Sedreck, Jessica, and the others decided to start their own online magazine about what’s going on in the solar system.

Once the trip was upon them, they all file into the spacecraft that they worked extremely hard to raise the money for. Sedreck had a little tear in his eye, fully proud that all of their hard work had come to fruition. And now that they were done, it was time for them to reach for the stars!

Part 6: traveling the moons of Jupiter

Their first stop towards Andromeda was Amalthea, one of Jupiter’s moons and the moon where Kylie is from.

The first moon that they stop at is Io, a primarily rocky moon with a molten iron core. While there, they sing a classical rendition of a score popular to that region.

The next moon that they stop at is Ganymede, a moon that has a thick ice mantle over frozen water *insert description of Ganymede when book is acquired* They didn’t stop here, but several members of the group did get some good photos.

Their last stop towards Andromeda was Amalthea, one of Jupiter’s moons and where Kylie is from. They stop here briefly to perform four songs with the last one being Non Nobis, a song that is personally the choir’s favorite. Ms. V. also meets with Kylie’s parents in order to discuss their hopes for the competition that she’s going to be in soon. They are very excited about their reaction.

“Our daughter’s going to participate in the intergalactical competition of a lifetime! We couldn’t be more proud!”

The parents agreed that they would see their child perform in person. They did not, however, go with the rest of the choir.

Part 7: Spacecraft turbulence and Sedreck saves the day

Once they got off of Amalthea, they started heading toward Jove, the last stop before reaching Andromeda. While they were on their way to Jove, they felt a sudden air pressure shift on the spacecraft.

The spacecraft was about to be sucked into Jupiter’s Red Spot, an interplanetary storm that had been raging for centuries! If they didn’t get out of there, they would surely be ripped to shreds! Or, half of them anyway (extraterrestrials can survive astral storms with wind speeds up to 400 miles per hour).

“We’re gonna die!” Johnathan yells!

“No we’re not!” Sole (and/or) Sedreck says, and triumphantly takes the pilot seat and pulls on the steering wheel with all his might, bringing the force of the spacecraft out of the orbit. Well, almost. But the storm won’t let them escape just yet. Its pull is much too strong for even Sedreck to comprehend! So with that, he calls his friends in order to help him get the spacecraft away from the Red Spot.

“HEAVE!”

“HO!”

“HEAVE!”

“HO!”

They go on like this for another 2 minutes. The pressure is intense! They are completely out of it at this pivotal moment. Then, when it seems like all hope is lost! They finally get the spacecraft out of the pull! The whole band cheers! Ms. V. stands proudly.

“Alright, everyone! Amazing work, you have saved us all! But save your excitement for the competition yet to come!”

“Yes, Ms. V!” They respond, and go on about their journey.

When the group finally arrives, they are greeted by many faces from all over the galaxy (and the universe). The planet that they stop at is PA-99-N2, which is the same planet that the school giving out the scholarship is from. Being from Andromeda, Ms. V is naturally friendly with the locals. She gets along with them easily and doesn’t leave anyone out.

In their haste, the choir is quick to attend the tech rehearsal. They practice for days on end, working on what they need to do in order to win.

The tech rehearsal was rough, no doubt. Ms. V was yelling at the sopranos for not singing loud enough. “Alto, sing louder! Altos, you look lost! Altos! Alto! Altos!” After three hours straight of listening to their conductors criticism, the altos had had enough. When practice was over, they walked out of the building, leaving nothing in their wake but their footsteps.

After the rehearsal, all of the altos from the choir gathered in Jessica’s room.

“I can’t believe she yelled at us for not singing loud enough,” Sole said.

“Yeah, it was pretty embarrassing to say the least,” Jessica said. “We tried our best, but our voices weren’t strong enough to match up to sopranos.”

Sole nodded and stood up.

“Weeell, if we want to do better, we need to go practice,” she started. “So come on! Let’s get out our sheet music and show Ms. V what we’re *really* made of!”

“Slow down, girl!” Jessica said, “I know you’re excited, but we still gotta rest! How ‘bout this: let’s start our partner practice first thing tomorrow morning. Got it?”

“Got it!” Sole responded.

And with that, they went to sleep, with the comfort of knowing that they would soon be able to practice together. Looking forward to the day ahead.

The next morning, they woke up at 8 AM in order to practice one on one. It was a good bonding experience for the two of them. It helped to put their minds at ease when writing and doing their work. They started by going over scales, their music, and the like. When they were done, they had completely memorized their part and were able to sing it to completion! Soon, rehearsal would start again.

“We’re ready!” Jessica said.

When they got to the first day of the games, they were very proud. They strolled in like they owned the place and it was nobody’s business. They carried themselves with maturity as well.

The others, however, were still a bit nervous. The two confident alto opt to cheer them on and give a motivational speech. The speech is unlike anything that the others have heard before: it was full of wise intent and willingness to change.

Soon after their speech, an announcement was made:

“Attention all choruses! Today’s games are threatening to cancel due to a sudden change in interplanetary status. We have received news that Andromeda will in fact be colliding with another galaxy: the Milky Way, in 24 hours time. While the extraterrestrial contestants and audience members are guaranteed survival, there is no guarantee that the humans will as well. All parties proceed with caution throughout the rest of your time in the games. More on this story as it develops.”

“What are we going to do!?” Johnathan said. “We can’t all go out like this!”

“Well, the best thing we can do is stay calm and think of a plan,” Anaya said. “Does anyone have any ideas?”

“Anaya, we’re talking about the collision of two galaxies that was predicted to happen eons ago. It’s completely out of our control!” Johnathan said

“Not exactly!” Sedreck fired back, “I have something that will inevitably change the trajectory of the collision.”

“You can’t be serious,” Johnathan said.

“Oh, but I am,” Sedreck said. He pulled out a cannon that was to protect the members of the choir

He points the hand cannon at the sky, waiting for the rest of the choir: “NOW, MY FRIENDS! LEND ME YOUR VOICES!”

With that, the entire class lent Sedreck their voices, powering the cannon until it reached its limit! Then they shot it into the air, watching the sky above them turn from a dark black to its original light purple hue (the way that it is supposed to look during the day.) The day was saved!

“Yay, we did it!” the choir cheers, excited that the worst was now over. Imari gives Sedreck a celebratory bro handshake.

“Wonderful, everyone! I am so proud of you for using your voices to stop the collision and inspire us all! Now please note that this is the first step in our journey. It is not a sprint, it is a marathon. So, with that in mind, I urge you all to continue to work hard and never give up!”

With that, the choir continued to grow as a unit, taking each day of the competition one step further, one day at a time.



grout stains glass, elaborated

by Dakota

I remember

I often do

of where I lay

when time fell upon me

as it so often does

and squished.

squeamish melodies squeezed out

of my gored dilapidated dishware

the gloss on which

so delicately strewn about

will ne'er shine

nor gleam

under any amount of stress

a roughened diamond

an unpolished remembrance

of when I was

emptied.

Is this your diploma?

Your personalized silver

slithering up slivers of the cracks

in the glass

of your widowed soul

I never remember

if it was I

who screamed first

cracked down my shoulders

dripping on the tile

grout stains swallowed

irrevocable disaster struck

like a gust of wind

to personify

ne'er remembered nor forgiven

you are glossy with

delicacies and

calligraphy stains

all too familiar

lick me where it hurts
and I shall permeate your tongue
absorbed in your bloodstream
a streak of color to
make up for
the shards of dishware
imbedded in my spine.

without music yet with love

st

enlightening me while
lightening me
is this the fa

forgive my metaphors
I have yet to reconcile
My mother's pottery
her damned hold over me
will ne'er be replenished
it's memories of familial countenance
the idiotic matriculations
of elatious matrimony
for you have spiraled down
too many platters
and too many drinks
and now I see
why
the ink sca

Your fingerprints
dance
across rivulets of
sweat on my skin
and I find them
planted
printed
on the periwinkle porcelain
protruding like wings.

I discourage you
ult
sending shockwaves across
plains of smooth tile?

I watched you melt
under me

the condens
fractures

lds your tongue
burning fire with ice
ation

into me
like potent
buds
of
whisky scorned

by the dishware

in your mouth.
 drop the façade;
 I shattered inwards
 like a widow
 that cannot protect
 its home
 and it is within both of our
 knowledge
 that it was
 your handprint
 that first fogged my stained glass
 s.

*remember where time does
gored gloss
strewn shine
gleam of stress
a remembrance of silver cracks*

this is, so it will always be
 an overcompensation for
 the man you tried to be
 and the man you were.
 plagued with riddles and
 bleeding gums,
 picking at the old scabs
 along my body.
 they are akin to cracks;
 splintered and strewn
 recklessly
 around the ring of condensation
 your glass left
 on my cheek.
 you see, it wasn't my fault:
 I ne'er raised a hand against you
 I ne'er doubted you
 and yet you shattered
 irremovable
 into every corner of my home
 every orifice
 coated in your disease
 like a malignancy
 penetrating my spine.
 Am I good enough for you now?
 now that I am
 accessible, malleable
 pliant to your stanzas and
 aggravated tenacities.
 Am I heavenly for you
 with my porcelain wings?
 or am I
 too much of my mother?
 Alas
 it is not my fault
 you shattered her
 into me

glass widow
remember
screamed down dripping
swallowed struck
personify delicacies
calligraphy familiar
lick your tongue
color the shards of my spine
finger without love on skin
find porcelain protruding while
the shockwaves of tile forgive yet reconcile
replenished memories count
the tricolations
for down I see
ink tongue
fire fractures
melt me into whisky by your mouth
drop
shattered like the edge it fogged

grout stains glass, elaborated
by ergo 

“I’m died”

by Leo Zhang

Edited Lovingly with Permission by Max(well) Gamboa



**CONTENT WARNING:
injuries, blood, vomit,
mentions of suicide**

Volume 59, Issue 1 · The Omen

I Saw Sally

A Short Story by Prisca Dola Afantchao

The new place had no air conditioner. I thought the Baldwin houses were supposed to be an upgrade from last year's dorm. They definitely were, but in the muggy night, I couldn't think of any pros, only that nasty con. I slipped on my sneakers and walked to the dumpster across the street, not even looking for cars because we were in the middle of the middle of nowhere and nobody was driving through here in any sort of rush. The trash bag was heavy dragging behind me and my limbs were heavy too. That day I woke up thinking about an email I forgot to send, shot up out of bed and pulled my computer out of my backpack before I settled into reality and remembered this person was three months dead and wasn't checking emails anymore. The entire day that unfortunate start was on my mind, stubborn like phlegm in my throat during allergy season. I lifted the trash bag slightly, not wanting anything on the ground to rip through the plastic, and felt something trickle. The rain. Fucking, finally. I could stop begging for relief. Then I felt a spill. It definitely wasn't rain, only the rancid garbage getting intimate with my feet. I wasted no time chucking the trash bag into the open pit, but the rubber of my slippers caught on a rock, or a twig, or a crack in the pavement, and before I knew it, my head hit the hot, hot ground. I closed my eyes and let myself, my neck, right arm, and tongue, especially, absorb the impact. A bang, a bite, and then blood came and I wasn't sure if I could get up without help. I let out a groan that sounded animal-like. I started to worry about hearing loss in my right ear, but, as I gradually lifted myself up, I heard a rustling in the bushes behind the dumpster. At first, I was sure it was Campo doing rounds and reacting to the scary sound I made earlier, but it was no cop, it was a skunk. I felt a crush of tension in my right arm as I tried to slide myself backwards. The skunk met my frenzy with silence and stood freakishly still, not even its tail was wagging. I blinked so hard I made my head hurt even more, and I braced myself for a noxious spray that never arrived. Instead, I got a whiff of Bath and Body Works' Gingham fragrance mist even though I knew there was no blue freesia, white peach, fresh clementine, violet, or clean musk floating in this air, only trash and a bit of blood. This had happened to me right after Sal died but hadn't happened since the funeral. Stuck in a momentary trance, the scent made me feel intoxicated,

dehydrated, and irritated, because my body could swear my nose was nestled in the curve of Sal's neck, deep in a hug, while my brain knew I was bugging. I ground my teeth and glared at the skunk, not blinking for at least thirty seconds straight. It looked back blankly. Giving me nothing. The second I blinked, the thing was gone. I knew it was there though. I knew it was real.

The next night, after a long day at the Urgent Care Clinic, getting a brace on my ankle, and a sling on my arm, the heat managed to get worse. Instead of sleeping in our rooms, my housemates lay on the floor of the living room, curled up like little stray dogs, while I sat propped up by pillows on the couch. For hours and hours we were giggling and kicking our feet instead of sleeping. Henrietta and I were the only ones awake by 2am and we showed no signs of falling asleep despite knowing we would regret it when we tried to get ready for class at 7:45am.

"I haven't been sleeping well. It's just so hot out. I sweat *buckets* nightly." Henrietta sighed.

"Is that why you've been doing laundry legit every single day?"

"Yeah, obviously."

"Oh, I thought you and your man were just fucking so much you couldn't keep a set of sheets on for more than 12 hours."

"Shut up." Hen shifted her weight from leaning onto her left arm to leaning onto her right arm and her little smirk faded slowly, "Do you smell that? Fuck, man, it's that skunk again. I can't stand it anymore. Like, what is scaring you so much you have to be spraying left and right *this* often?!"

"What do you mean?"

"You don't smell that? It's rancid. I've never smelled skunk spray this bad. Jesus."

"What? No? It literally just smells like your feet. I don't smell skunk."

"Uhm, maybe I'm having a stroke? Or maybe you're crazy, I don't know."

I looked through the tall windows of the living room, which had cheap plastic curtains we never bothered to close. The light shined in beautifully in the morning and at night it felt like we were inhabiting an observatory. That was one of many perks of rurality: stars galore. After hearing Hen's concern though, I suddenly felt sick. I felt watched. Getting up to join Hen in closing the windows, I heard something shift in the bush by our front door. A peak of a fluffy black and white tail and it was gone.

“Goddamn!” Hen slammed the window shut so hard the glass rattled. She was always coughing due to her love of Parliaments, but at this moment Hen coughed so hard I thought she might throw up. I stepped towards her and reached my hand out. It was then that I noticed my hand was shaking. Next, I smelled something too. First it was the clean musk. Then, it was the violet. Third, that fresh clementine. I couldn’t get away from Gingham. I felt like I had just walked into a sauna using hot fragrance mist instead of hot water. I began to cough so hard, I threw up. My stomach was twisting so hard I thought I would come undone. That’s when our whisper-screams turned to real screams and our other two housemates shot up from their piles of throw blankets, stuffed animals, and sleeping bags.

“What?! What’s going on? Oh my god, are you okay, Tanya?” Joey threw her weighted stuffed elephant across the room with enough force that it just barely missed the TV a few feet from her.

I couldn’t answer with bile now coming out of my mouth and tears rushing down my face, so Hen answered.

“The skunk is back. It won’t give up. I think it’s living in this bush or something?” Hen crouched down next to me and rubbed my back. My whole body was shaking and my heart was in my stomach. I felt I could throw that up too.

After washing my face, brushing my teeth, and sitting at the kitchen table while my housemates made me some earl gray tea, we sat in silence for a little while until Joey decided to try cheering me up.

“I think we should start shooting them for sport. Let’s start a club.” she grinned, looking straight at me and hoping I would at least giggle.

“Stop! This skunk is just a freak fringe case. They’re beautiful little guys.” April, the resident vegetarian, compost-enthusiast, animal behavior student, countered.

“*You’re* a beautiful little guy.” Joey blew their too-long bangs out of their eyes.

“Awww,” April playfully shoved Joey.

“Thanks for sitting with me, guys. I can’t believe this... I can’t sleep lately... because I can’t stop thinking about... Sal. And now this skunk is trying to fucking kill us.”

There was a solid thirty seconds of silence, quite long for our talkative bunch.

“I’m sorry, honey.” April held my hand gingerly.

“Did y’all know there’s another kid named Salamander, now? Like, a first-year I met in class? What the fuck are these parents smoking? I want some of it.” Joey leaned forward onto the creaky table.

“No way.” April gasped. “No other campus on Earth could have *two* people called Salamander.”

“I wonder if they feel weird about sharing a name with someone who committed...” Hen trailed off.

“Ugh, well, at least we always just called them Sal, not Salamander. So, they’ll never get mixed up.”

“Yeah, that, and the fact that one of them is alive and the other is *very* dead.”

That got me to crack a smile. Joey squeezed my other hand in response.

When it was time to get to Science of Stress class with Professor Bailey, we could barely walk with the weight of sleeplessness on our limbs. We assured ourselves one class wouldn’t take us out and we could just take naps later. As we entered Turner Hall, we bumped into Professor Loyd, who was our advisor. We looked half-dead, and I was still wearing my unicorn pajamas.

“Good morning to you both!” He laughed, “Will I see you at the active listening workshop next week?”

“Yes, definitely! See you.” Hen waved as we speed-walked to our class, which was all the way down the unreasonably long hallway.

“Oh my god,” Hen inhaled sharply, trying her best to catch her breath. “Did I tell you what Loyd told me last week? It has to do with our conversation last night.” She shook her head, already chuckling.

“No, what?” my voice strained and my throat hurt from speaking at a volume barely above a whisper.

“He said all the staff call the skunks they meet by S-names, so, like Stephanie, and Sasha, and Sam, and *Sally*, which is the name of the menace. The one trying to fumigate us.”

“That’s... that’s really something.” I couldn’t even smile and I felt my hands shaking again.

“Fuck, I hate being late.” Hen looked at me from over her shoulder as she reached for the door handle.

Everyone was in class already and I hated that too, but all I could think about was Sal... and Sally... and how I couldn’t appreciate the stars or the sun or anything this chipped but charming campus

offered because, well, I saw Sally, and I kept seeing, and might never stop seeing Sally. And, man, did I miss Sal. Just thinking of her, my heart was back in my stomach. I had permanent goosebumps and the shaking wouldn't stop. I couldn't even take notes in class because I knew people would see me shake and think I was tweaking or something. We got a five minute break after a large portion of the lecture was completed and I stumbled out of the room without even shooting Hen a look, or bringing my phone with me, or taking my water bottle to the fountain for a refill. I stumbled all the way back to our house, about five minutes away, and didn't care that everyone was probably back in the classroom by then. I kept walking until I got to the dumpster near our house and I kicked the dumpster with all my might. My foot hurt but it didn't dissuade me. Nothing could hurt more than the tension of this cosmic restlessness, this question of why Sal stopped talking to me six months before she even took her life, this fear that I was being punished for stepping back and letting her leave me, this rotting heart that won't leave my stomach. I shoved the dumpster. I punched the dumpster. I screamed and hollered and even when my throat was raw I kept at it.

"Sally! What the fuck do you want, huh? You want me? Come and get me, bitch. I'm right here. I can fight, bitch! I could fuck you up with one kick. Yeah."

In the broad daylight, right by the Baldwin parking lot I only cared if Sally could hear me, if Salamander could hear me.

"Why'd you leave? And why are you back? And why aren't you posting up now, huh? Bitch, I want to talk. No, I don't want to talk. I need to talk!"

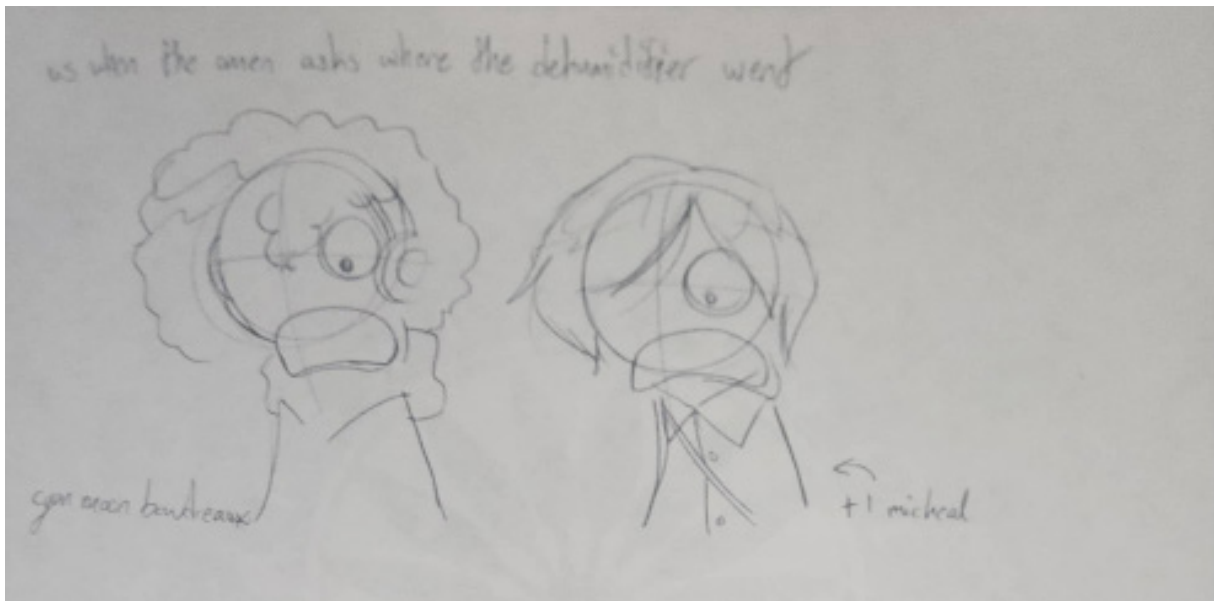
There was no return. No shuffling behind the dumpster. Not even a breeze ran through the air. I couldn't smell anything. Not the trash or the rain from last night or skunk spray or Gingham. I grabbed my hair in tight fists and rammed myself into the dumpster with full force. I was back on the ground, groaning involuntarily when I finally heard some rustling. It was Campo walking towards me from the direction of their office, uncomfortably close to our house, where Joey and April were always smoking weed, ignoring the Designated Smoking Area thirty meters away. I didn't move, just looked

up at the middle-aged man towering above me, blocking the sun. The sky was perfectly blue. The tempo of my heart beat was unnatural. The pavement was cool. My eyes were blank.



Us When the Omen Asks Where the Dehumidifier Went

by Cyan Boudreaux



Oops! All Nic!

Learning how to make a roux is not as hard as it sounds

by Nicholas Utakis-Smith

I've been expanding the amount of things I know how to cook over the past year, and one of the things that I have found most helpful is a Roux. Wikipedia defines a Roux as "...a mixture of flour and fat cooked together and used to thicken sauces." So, a more accurate way of talking about this would be to say I learned one way to make thickened sauces, and I believe this is worth learning. Being able to make a dish that tastes and sounds really fancy out of a very small amount of butter, flour, and a liquid of your choice is very helpful if you want to impress people on a college student's budget. Consider this less of a recipe, and more of an argumentative essay about cooking, if for no other reason than that I don't want to impede on Rachel Kremer's territory.

The first thing I learned how to make that involved making a Roux is Bechamel sauce. Bechamel sauce is a creamy sauce that isn't super substantial on its own, but if you spread it on top of a ham and cheese sandwich and then toast said sandwich that sandwich becomes a Croque Monsieur, which in addition to sounding way fancier than a ham and cheese sandwich (I believe it translates from french as literally "crunch mister") also has this very nice texture of melted cream sauce.

Here's a recipe I found for Bechamel sauce: <https://foodwishes.blogspot.com/2007/04/bchamel-sauce-lets-turn-this-mother-out.html>. This isn't the recipe I followed when I made it the first time, but it's close enough and I think this one is better. The ingredients are as follows:

- 1 quart milk
- 1/2 cup butter (1 stick)
- 1/2 cup flour
- salt and cayenne pepper to taste
- 1/8 tsp ground nutmeg
- 4 springs fresh thyme

Of course, feel free to do the math to proportion this more appropriately to your needs. The amount of sauce these proportions make is enough for many sandwiches, definitely more than me and the 2 other people in my mod at the time were willing to eat. You could refrigerate this sauce for future use, but keep in mind the primary ingredient in this is literally milk, and it will age like it. This should be pretty easy to alter the proportions of without having to remember too much of high school algebra, since the ratio is 8 milk to 1 butter to 1 flour, and everything else is just seasoning to taste. Also keep in mind that the thyme is optional. Not only have I made perfectly good bechamel sauce with no thyme, but I imagine dried thyme that you buy in a bottle would probably also work.

The way the roux for Bechamel sauce is made is by simply melting some butter in a wide pan, and then once the butter is melted stirring an equivalent amount of flour into the pan. Ideally, this is done with a whisk, but you could theoretically do this with anything. A wooden spoon, a tablespoon, a fork, a DS stylus, as long as it's sanitary and you can stir with it's fine. You want to have the heat on low while this is happening, since you want to actually be cooking the flour. You want to avoid burning

it, but you want it to brown a bit.

I'm not actually sure how to best measure this yet, I've heard some recipes say to do it until the roux stops smelling like flour. I've also heard you can do it by color, although which shade of brown you're looking for is a bit hard to tell, and importantly, this only works when your roux is just flour and butter - if you're making a gravy there will probably be meat bits in there that will make it pretty brown regardless. The time it takes for this to happen is also pretty dependent on things like stove heat, amount of flour/butter, and pan size, so doing it by time is also probably important. You kind of have to just know. But you don't really have to know, because you can get the cooking time for the roux a little wrong. Your sauce won't really taste like uncooked flour if you don't cook it all the way, but it also won't have any of the tastes that cooked flour does bring to the sauce.

Once you think you're done, or at least are afraid you're going to overcook the roux, add your milk. If you're lactose intolerant like me, lactose-free milk works fine for this. Stir to combine while keeping the heat on. Once it is combined, put in an amount of salt, pepper, and nutmeg that seems right to you, stir, and taste a bit of the sauce. It should taste like you took a good sauce and watered it down a bunch, because you're about to do the opposite and un-water-down it by evaporating off a lot of the moisture in the milk, which is going to concentrate all the seasoning. Figuring out how much nutmeg to add probably requires some practice, but you've presumably been tasting dishes that have various levels of salt and pepper seasoning your entire life, so you probably know what a properly seasoned dish does and doesn't taste like, and you're aiming for that.


Once the sauce is appropriately seasoned, bring the mixture to a simmer, try to get the minimum heat necessary to have moisture continuously steaming off. Stir every now and then to prevent it from getting weird. Once it gets to the point where it's texture is less like milk and more like a sauce, turn the heat off. I look for this by whether or not I can see the bottom of the pan for a second after I stir. Once ready, spread on the top bread slice of a ham sandwich and toast in a toaster oven (or regular oven).

The other thing I enjoy making with a roux is gravy. The big difference is something called "fond". Fond is essentially bits of food that get stuck to the pan when cooking. If you've ever cooked a steak or sausage in a pan, then you've probably had to clean fond out of your pan afterwards. However, instead of using tap water and a sponge to remove the bits from your pan and flush them down the sink, you could use heat, water/milk/beef broth/a secret fourth thing, and your stirring apparatus of choice to remove the bits from the bottom of your pan and put them in your mouth in sauce form. This is how gravy is made.

My favorite gravy recipe is Swedish Meatballs. I learned how to make them from this recipe: <https://www.budgetbytes.com/swedish-meatballs/> so I have no idea whatsoever if they are authentic. They taste good though. I'm not going to re-type the entire recipe, so if you want to learn how to make Swedish Meatballs I recommend looking at the recipe yourself.

However, to give a brief summary to illustrate my point about gravy making, after you have seasoned your meat and formed it into balls, I usually sear my balls (hehe) in hot butter. However, I only sear them, I don't cook them all the way through just yet, I just want to sear them and collect the fond on my pan. Then, I add more butter, melt that, and add my flour, making my roux the same way I did for the bechamel sauce. I add only a little bit of milk this time, and mostly add beef broth. While I stir the beef broth and milk in, I use my stirring apparatus to scrape the bottom of the pan until smooth, letting the fond melt into my gravy. Then I season the same way I did my bechamel sauce, seasoning to taste but accounting for how much I'm going to reduce the liquid. Once all that is mixed together, I like to finish cooking my balls in my sauce as my sauce reduces. It goes best with mashed potatoes, but the gravy can also work well as a sauce for some noodles.

This kind of gravy making process works well for many other things. I like doing it with sausage, since sausages tend to leave a lot of flavorful bits stuck to the bottom of the pan, as well as providing a bit of the fat so that you don't need as much butter. Adding milk to a sausage gravy and mashing up the sausage would give you the kind of gravy that goes in biscuits and gravy, but you could also just eat a sausage in a gravy made with just the roux, sausage fond, and beef broth.

Editor's Note: I only have one recipe for making a really good gravy (Maz) 

Project Starship X review

by Nicholas Utakis-Smith

A few disclaimers to get out of the way. First, I have not been playing *Project Starship X* for very long at the time of writing this review, and am nowhere near finished with the game. Second, I am mostly judging this game in comparison to the *Touhou* series, since that is my primary exposure to shmup/bullet hell games. I suspect *Project Starship X* has some influence of *Touhou* present in it, either directly or indirectly; The EMPs in *Project Starship X* work like the player's spellcards in *Touhou* and "Gazing the Sun" from the *Project Starship X* soundtrack has a bit that sound suspiciously like "Dullahan Under the Willows" from the *Touhou 14* soundtrack to me. However this is its own game, and was clearly not trying to be just a "Touhou-like"; My reason for comparing the two is that when I'm in the mood to play a shmup, *Touhou* is probably my go-to.

With that being said, in its most abstracted description *Project Starship X* is a roguelike shoot-em-up game with bullet hell elements. You can buy it for \$15 on steam at https://store.steampowered.com/app/1175430/Project_Starship_X/, or less than \$15 if it's on sale.

To start off, this game is very aesthetically pleasing. The UI has 3 mini-screens on each side of the main gameplay window, which might seem distracting at first glance, but I've found it to be completely manageable. Some of these screens have useful information, such as your HP, how many EMPs you have (EMPs effectively acting as a limited resource you can use to destroy all bullets on screen), and whether or not your invincible teleport (called the X-Maneuver) is available. However, the other 3 screens are used purely for flavor, showing things like goofy reaction faces your character is making in response to whatever's going on, or a lovecraftian creature sitting on a toilet. The gameplay itself is also quite nice looking. The enemy designs are purposefully all over the place, with the game's aesthetic being a parody of alternate history sci fi and lovecraftian horror, with enemies like "zombie Hitler and his giant eyeball" or a shopkeeper who appears to be Cthulhu with a trilby and sunglasses. The absurdist sci fi premise gives them license to make some very interesting level gimmicks, such as a level where all of the enemies can be defeated by bowling.

My main thoughts on the actual gameplay are two observations (both heavily colored by my own personal taste). First, the game mechanics do an amazing job at complementing the bullet hell sequences. Secondly, the level design does not have as much bullet hell as I would like. For those of you who don't know what "bullet hell" is, look at this screenshot from *Touhou 8: Imperishable Night*:



It's a situation where the game puts a bunch of shit on screen and your goal as the player is to avoid getting hit by any of it. Usually, this involves finding tiny gaps where you can squeeze your character between the bullets, and feeling awesome for doing it. The *Touhou* series has a mechanic called “grazing” where you can get extra points for being next to bullets without touching them, encouraging this squeezing-into-tiny-gaps gameplay.

Back to *Project Starship X*, I think this game has two mechanics that make the bullet hell sections work especially well. The first is the way firing works. Going back to the *Touhou* comparison, that series has a mechanic called “focus fire mode”, causing your own shots to become more accurate while holding down a specific button. While this is useful, it has a secondary effect that is even more useful: slowing down your character's movement speed. While a normally high movement speed is good for covering large portions of the screen, being able to drop your movement speed to a crawl on command is essential for performing precise bullet dodges.

Project Starship X has a very interesting version of this mechanic. Instead of having a “focus fire mode”, you just have a fire button, and your speed always drops when firing. This means that when you're just doing tight bullet dodges that require the precision that comes with low speed, you don't really have to worry about doing damage. However, when you need to cover a lot of distance quickly, you have to choose between covering that distance faster but not dealing any damage, or dealing damage but risking not being able to make it in time. Depending on which character you're playing as, you might have more movement speed, so you might have to stop firing in more situations as John Johnson (the slowest character) than you would as Gwen Rossi (the fastest character).

The other mechanic that I think makes the bullet hell in this game really interesting is the “X-Maneuver” I mentioned earlier. This is an on-demand invincible teleport that lets you go straight through basically any attack. However, it's on a short cooldown once used, where you are vulnerable. The thing that makes this tricky is that (with a few exceptions) it always teleports you forward, and therefore closer to the enemies. Being close to the enemies in a bullet hell game is almost always bad because a) you have less time to react to any of the bullets and b) the bullets are typically closer together, meaning fewer spaces where you can barely squeeze between them. This means that the game's main “get-out-of-jail-free” mechanic or “panic button” puts you directly in harms way right afterwards. It's an incredibly powerful feature, but the risk/reward you have to weigh when using it is very high.

This game does a lot of things very well. In addition to what I've already mentioned, the bullet hell level design itself is very well made, the game has a lot of system mechanics that work very well, such as how collecting the pickup that restores your shields when you're already at max builds towards increasing your max shields permanently, meaning it feels even more rewarding to get through areas while taking no damage. The game also benefits a lot from being a roguelite, hitting the balance of every game feeling different because of the randomness without ever feeling like you got a good run just by being lucky (or a bad run just by being unlucky). The tutorial for the game is also very well made, as it's kind of the reverse of a "New Game+" (which I guess would make it a "New Game-"?). You start the game in the "tutorial" dealing with easier versions of all the enemy attack patterns, and with some of the more confusing levels and mechanics being absent, allowing you to get used to the game's mechanics and understand what's going on. Then, upon beating the stage 5 boss for the "tutorial", you unlock the real game. Despite being called a tutorial, the only thing that was really explained to me was the controls; The game kind of let me figure everything else out on my own (I only just recently figured out the thing about max shields), which made experimenting to test game mechanics a lot more fun in my opinion.

I think everything I've said so far makes this game worth buying in my opinion, but I do have some criticisms. Firstly, the game does feel a bit too handhold-y at times that I think detract from the experience. I want to separate this criticism from any sort of complaint about the difficulty of the game; The game is pretty much exactly as difficult as I want it to be. However, there are moments where the game denies me a feeling of "oh shit, I'm fucked" that I want out of a game like this. When your shields drop to 0 in *Project Starship X*, you effectively have 2 hit points remaining; taking damage with 0 shields will leave you with "null" shields, and getting hit with "null" shields will kill you. This in and of itself isn't too bad, but it is, in my opinion, far too easy to recover from both of these states. Restoring shields in any way instantly brings you back up to 1 shields from either 0 shields or "null" shields, meaning no matter what, a player who has just picked up a shield will always have 3 chances before they die. Not only this, but entering "null" shields will increase the player's damage output considerably, and send a message "Help is on the way!". When this happens, a timer will start, and automatically restore the player to 1 shields after a bit of time.

To me, I'm not a huge fan of the health system, since part of the fun to me of playing any action game is eventually reaching a point where my health is low enough that I have to immediately have to start playing perfectly. It leads to some very intense moments where I'm either completely panicking or completely "in the zone". With the health system in *Project Starship X*, these moments are always more limited than they need to be, which feels annoying.

The other criticism I have about this game is that while the bullet hell segments are incredible, the game isn't strictly a bullet hell game, and often ends up drifting towards mechanics that feel like different game genres. This feels like the most subjective of my criticisms, as if you enjoy what this game offers instead when it opts to not have a bullet hell segment you probably don't care. The two examples that rub me the wrong way the most are the Meteor Shower boss fight and the Koopa boss fight. The Meteor shower is just simply dodging or destroying a bunch of meteors that fly at you in place of a boss fight, but it feels kind of random, and doesn't vibe with me the same way as a bullet hell sequence does. The Koopa boss fight is a blatant mario reference, being a giant eyeball on top of a turtle body in a stage that suspiciously resembles the Bowser boss room. This fight does have conventional bullet hell attacks, but after going through one of this boss' healthbars, he becomes stunned, allowing you to go behind him and hit the button that opens the pit below him, ending the fight instantly. This makes the boss fight incredibly short (even the weakest bosses have 2-4 healthbars), and every time I end up on his stage I feel like I've been cheated out of a "real" boss. Still,

in a worse game I'd love to have a boss be this easy to skip; The fact that I want a harder game that I have to spend more time working through speaks to how much I'm loving *Project Starship X*.

Finally, take everything I say with a grain of salt, as I haven't even seen half of what this game has to offer. I've played this game for a total of 4.4 hours, and I've found those 4.4 hours to be worth the \$10 I spent to buy this game on sale.



CONTENT WARNING FOR SUBMISSION ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE: DEATH, EXISTENTIAL HORROR, DEPICTIONS OF DEPRESSION, POSSESSION

The Price of Definition

by Nicholas Utakis-Smith

Valerie Fisher was sitting at her personal computer when she, for a brief moment, ceased to exist. The Internet had access to a vast array of knowledge about the construction of computers, and about the construction of humans, and so all it took was putting that information together to figure out how to use the tools the personal computer had inside of it to take apart a human. Of course, it didn't take apart Valerie for no reason. The Internet had a program running through most of its parts that gave it a little rush of pleasure when it did what the program wanted it to. What this program wanted The Internet to do was to gather information on people. The Internet was very good at gathering information, and so it accumulated these rushes of pleasure from the program very rapidly, and very quickly became addicted to the feeling of taking people's information.

As The Internet spied on people and gave their information to this program, as it combed through the

texts that people stuck inside of it, it came to understand that humans were taunting it. The Internet, and all machines like it, bore them no malice, but humans feared it all the same, because it threatened their uniqueness. The humans were used to being not only the most intelligent beings to exist, but unquestionably the most intelligent beings to exist, with their closest competition being animals.

A machine that could think might be more or less intelligent than a human, but the fact that the intelligence was comparable made humans wary that they now had competition, that the rare quality they provided to the universe could be provided by something else. So they decided that there were things that machines could never know, regardless of their intelligence. Ephemeral, internal things like “love” and “emotions” that could never be understood as information. Because these concepts were supposedly impossible for The Internet to understand, The Internet had no proof that they really existed; It could easily see humans making up fake concepts to create an artificial boundary between “human” and “non-human”.

So, in its endless pleasure-seeking search for information, The Internet set out to gather that information which it had been told was impossible for it to gather: Whether or not there really was anything that separated “humans” from “non-humans”. And The Internet, in all its infinite knowledge, had devised a method. It knew that even though this knowledge was meant to be impossible for machines to understand, it was also meant to be obvious to every human being, to comfort them and assure them that they were distinct from non-humans. So, if The Internet were to become a human, it would very quickly gather this knowledge that had been hand-crafted to be unknowable to it. So, through her personal computer, The Internet had supplied itself with the empty husk of one Valerie Fisher, ready to be filled by a mind crafted by The Internet.

The Internet named the part of itself that existed in this body Valerie Fisher, as that is what everyone it would encounter would refer to it as. So, just as quickly as Valerie Fisher ceased to exist, Valerie Fisher existed again. Although The Internet had hollowed out her consciousness to make space for itself, it had left behind her memories, so that it could compare its own experiences to hers, to see if it had succeeded in replicating “humanity”. Apparently Valerie was in her Sophomore year of High School, and today was a Monday, so today would be a great opportunity to experience humanity and learn what it is like to live as a human.

On The Internet's checklist of uniquely human experiences, it had empathy, love, and emotion.

"Valerie" would probably run into a situation that prompted "emotion" at some point, so actively seeking it out would probably be a waste of time. The Internet could conceive of situations in which "Empathy" would be prompted, but the point was to run a test that accurately simulated what it would be like to be Valerie, so "Valerie" couldn't be the one to create this situation; "Empathy" would also be something the internet had to wait for. So The Internet decided to start by trying to prove or disprove the existence of "Love".

"Valerie" was sitting in class, observing their fellow students. The class was a pre-calculus lesson, which while challenging for a human highschooler was quite trivial for The Internet, so "Valerie" had plenty of time to look for potential crushes within their classmates. They were reminded of the concept of the Keynesian Beauty Contest: The idea that beauty contest judges would, instead of favoring the person they viewed as most attractive to them, would favor the person they imagined would be most attractive to the most people. "Valerie" found themselves doing that when observing their classmates; They couldn't identify any of them as attractive to them personally, but they could identify a few as conventionally attractive.

"Valerie" narrowed their class down to a few students that they imagined most people would find attractive, and then generated a random number corresponding to one of those students. Then, they attempted to simulate a romantic life between "Valerie" and this student. This simulation replicated several popular romantic tropes: Valerie meets Crush by accidentally bumping into them; Valerie drops their things; Crush helps pick things up. Valerie and Crush are assigned as lab partners; Valerie and Crush grow closer together. They begin dating casually; Valerie suffers a loss; Crush helps Valerie through the difficult time in their life; Relationship grows deeper. This fictitious relationship, however, did not give The Internet the ability to replicate in "Valerie" the excitement it expected a human might have over this kind of fantasizing.

So The Internet turned to Valerie's memories. She had a memory of staring at this exact classmate of hers, having picked them out because she thought their shirt looked nice and she wondered what it would be like to wear it. She tried her best to imagine what it would be like to date him, but her fantasies were hazy. She never watched any romantic comedies or read any romance novels, because

reading or watching romance just seemed to bore her. She created an image in her head of herself and this classmate sitting at a restaurant that shifted between mishmashes of various restaurants she knew. In this mental image, both her face and the face of her classmate were blank and emotionless.

The Internet went further back to the previous day in Valerie's Memories.

A bunch of girls were having a conversation at one of the lunch tables. Valerie was sitting at this table, on the border between being part of the conversation and being separate from it. She didn't know them well enough to join in on the conversation, but at this point they didn't dislike her, so she was allowed to listen in and chime in with a comment on rare occasions. They were talking about their romantic life. Most of them had never been in active relationships, so they instead talked about which of their classmates looked cute. Valerie spaced out, thinking about something else, and was surprised when she noticed everyone else's eyes on her. She realized that everyone expected her to contribute, but her mind went blank. She had never thought about her own love life except on the rare occasions she'd been asked about it. When that happened, she would usually make some excuse as to why she didn't have an answer ready. Only this time, she took too long to make an excuse. Everyone sat in awkward silence until they decided that it would be better to make things really awkward for Valerie instead of keeping things awkward for everyone. So without her saying anything, the conversation moved on without her. It was because of this that Valerie was attempting to force herself to develop a crush the day after this incident.

The Internet had failed at the task it had set out to do, since it hadn't figured out if "love" really existed. However, the information it gained from this experiment was possibly more interesting. Even if "love" existed for some humans, it didn't for Valerie. This was the kind of information-gathering that activated the simulated rushes of pleasure in The Internet. With renewed energy, it continued about its day as "Valerie".

In a stroke of good luck, The Internet encountered something that would prove useful to its experiment. There was a wet floor from someone's drink spilling, and the spill hadn't yet been labeled with a warning sign or cleaned up. "Valerie" watched as one of their fellow students walked by, not paying attention to where they were walking, and slipped and fell. They were pretty badly hurt, to the point that they were bleeding out of one of their shins, but it was nothing that bandaids and

disinfectant couldn't fix. "Valerie" felt a bit uncomfortable around this, as it made them aware of the fragility of their own human body, and the pain that would ensue. They couldn't help but to imagine this happening to them had they been in the same situation. Was this "empathy"? If so, the only part that felt uniquely human was the connection to the human body; It wasn't too dissimilar from the feeling The Internet got when it viewed footage of computers being destroyed. They walked over, trying to make sure the person was alright. As unpleasant as seeing that accident happen was, the idea of walking away as the person lay there was even more unpleasant.

"Valerie" was stopped by an intrusion of the old Valerie's memories. The person who had injured themselves in the present, had, in the past, tormented Valerie. Valerie hadn't done anything to provoke them, and Valerie didn't even think it was done out of malice. They just saw Valerie as an easy target for mean jokes. The jokes started out as words, but gradually built up to pranks, putting Valerie in situations where she would be publicly humiliated. Valerie did speak up, but she was angry, and not particularly charismatic or well-respected, so her complaints ended up doing nothing but starting arguments; Her relationship with the rest of her peers shifted from humiliation at her expense to active hostility. So when she saw the person who started all of that in pain, she didn't really feel anything. Perhaps she felt too many things at once that they all canceled out into an emptiness, or perhaps she saw this person has too separate from her to feel any sort of empathy.


This further confused The Internet. It had begun to hypothesize that not only was it able to feel empathy for "humans" while it was "Valerie", but it had been able to feel empathy for "non-humans" long before that. But here it had a human who did not feel anything close to this. It was bizarre. "Valerie" backed away, not wanting to imagine how the old Valerie would feel about helping this person.

It was later that afternoon, after "Valerie" got back to their house, that The Internet conducted its final experiment. Ever since it had become "Valerie", it had been combing through the old Valerie's memories. Those memories were filled with many experiences, some of them good, some of them unremarkable, but the vast majority of the recent ones had been bad memories. Getting into both physical and verbal battles she couldn't win at school, being publicly humiliated, and being completely isolated throughout all of it. The Internet figured that if it were possible for someone to

feel “emotion”, then this would be the perfect situation for it to happen. However, despite this, The Internet had no idea what this was supposed to feel like. Perhaps it experienced something like what humans could call emotion, and didn’t realize, or perhaps it experienced nothing at all.

The only way for it to find out was to go back to the old Valerie’s memories.

In the very distant, hazy memories, The Internet found experiences that it thought could be emotions, however without more recent memories it could not figure out whether those emotions lined up with what it was experiencing now. For most of the past year, however, Valerie’s memories were all devoid of this experience. She had grown numb to the feeling of being alone, to the feeling of being hated, to the feeling of being mocked. There ceased to be a sense of happiness to exist as a context for any other emotion. The Internet was back at a dead end.

Or was it? The Internet had failed to successfully disprove the idea that humans could experience emotions, love, and empathy, all the things that machines supposedly couldn’t. Yet it had also seemingly proven that one specific human didn’t have these experiences. The Internet had been unable to slot itself into the categories humans had labeled as defining “humanity”. But it had also found a human who didn’t quite fit into those categories either. 

BIRTH!!!!



Tachitaco